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VIEWPOINT: North Dakota needs to stand up for clean energy

North Dakota was founded based on the pioneering spirits of its men and women. Now, we have an opportunity to lead the nation again, by establishing sources of clean energy and creating revolutionary change in national energy policy.

By: **Katherine Mehl** and **Rebecca Simmons**, Grand Forks Herald

GRAND FORKS — North Dakota was founded based on the pioneering spirits of its men and women. Now, we have an opportunity to lead the nation again, by establishing sources of clean energy and creating revolutionary change in national energy policy. The decision to develop clean energy is anything but political; it makes environmental and fiscal sense both for North Dakota and for the U.S. Clean energy will allow the U.S to alleviate global climate change, halt unnecessary spending both domestically and overseas and create sustainable, local jobs.

Climate change is real, although winters in North Dakota may make this difficult to believe. In 2007, a United Nations intergovernmental science panel declared that climate change is “unequivocal” based on observations of global air temperature increases, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global sea levels. In 2010, NOAA reported that global warming is undeniable based on reports of scientists in 48 countries. Based on records, NOAA also declared that the past decade (2001 to 2009) was the warmest in recorded history. Global climate change, unfortunately, is not a debatable issue or a matter of opinion; it is a fact of life in our world today.

The source of global climate change, like the phenomenon itself, is also clear. Greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide, cause a rise in global temperatures by trapping sunlight in the atmosphere. In 1997, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated that carbon dioxide levels have been greatly increasing since industrialization in the 1900s. A decade of data has not altered this conclusion. In 2010, using new data, NOAA confirmed climate change is driven by human-produced carbon dioxide. The majority of carbon dioxide emissions also have an undeniable source, fossil fuel use. As long as current practices of fossil fuel production and use are maintained, global climate change will continue to accelerate.

Why would climate change be so bad, though? Global climate change is more than a slight increase in temperatures worldwide. Globally and locally, there is more flooding, landslides, wildfires and poor air quality. Impacts on wildlife, especially important in this region, are high. But this is more than a climate change issue. It is an issue that affects state and national economies.

We often hear our neighbors' concerns about deficit spending, high taxes, and high rates of unemployment; clean energy is a way of addressing these timely issues. The Western Area Power Administration buys expensive power from other regions to supplement hydropower produced by the Missouri River because of fluctuating river conditions (also caused by climate change). Further, our nation buys the majority of our fossil fuels, totaling about \$1 billion a day, from foreign oil companies. Our state can turn this around by investing in the future — clean energy produced in North Dakota. Our region can become a leader in alternative energy through the development of second-generation biofuels, solar, wind and geothermal power. North Dakota will benefit directly from production of clean energy through economic development, new jobs for North Dakotans, and a cleaner environment.

Unfortunately, the legislation that would cut harmful pollution and create these economic opportunities has failed to pass in the Senate. North Dakota needs to step up and tell our leaders to support this legislation. Our state is built on the pioneering tradition of taking chances where others would not, going new directions when others delayed. Clean energy legislation gives us the opportunity to continue this tradition and lead our nation again.

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