

**Statement of Senator Craig Thomas, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Energy, Natural Resources, and Infrastructure**

**Hearing on Coal: A Clean Future  
April 26, 2007**

First I'd like to thank all our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to your comments. I especially want to welcome Steve Waddington, Executive Director of the Wyoming Infrastructure Authority.

We are in an environment now where many are concerned about the prospect of global climate change, we are faced with finite fossil fuel resources, and many are focused on alternative energy sources. I understand and agree with the goals of a clean environment and development of alternative energy sources. However, I am also frustrated by the lack of recognition that, while renewable resources are likely to play a greater role in our future, fossil fuels are our present.

This is a very important point. Many of the renewable technologies are not ready for mass deployment to meet our country's current and growing energy needs. Coal, by contrast, already provides more than 50 percent of our country's electricity.

Frankly, coal gets a bad rap. Recently there was a full-page ad in a number of publications proclaiming "Coal is Filthy." This message merely reinforces the myth that using coal necessarily belches tons of harmful pollutants into the environment. In fact, technologies are well-developed to make coal not only very clean, but extremely versatile. These days we can burn coal cleanly to produce electricity; we can gasify it; we can liquefy it into diesel; we can even turn it into plastic or ethanol. A number of these technologies are in use already and commercially available.

I am also concerned that carbon dioxide emissions have become the standard by which environmental performance is judged. As humans, every time we breathe we emit carbon dioxide. Our livestock alone is responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. I've suggested that we take a more balanced approach toward how we view "pollution," its causes, and responsible ways to address it.

We're going to hear a lot today about CO<sub>2</sub> capture and sequestration. I would like to emphasize, however, that CO<sub>2</sub> is only a small part of the issue we have before us. In discussing the perceived threat of climate change and attempting to address it, we must not lose sight of options to improve the use of a reliable domestic resource like coal. I would like to remind my colleagues here today of the economic and tax revenue benefits associated with advancing these value-added coal conversion activities.

(over)

In Wyoming, we produce a lot of coal – 36 percent of the amount needed to keep the lights on in the United States. We shovel that coal, and we ship it all across the country. Mining coal has been a tremendous economic benefit to my home state of Wyoming, but I believe we can do better.

There is a real opportunity to develop a more value-added industry, using that coal resource as a feedstock. It is important that we identify and move forward with ways to improve the environmental performance of coal. I hope to hear from the witnesses today about these opportunities.

The purpose of today's hearing is to explore our opportunities with coal and how well tax incentives currently in place are working to encourage clean coal development and deployment.

I am hopeful that today's hearing will be instructive as to the costs and benefits of the various clean coal technologies and their relevance to our future energy policy.