

This is Google's cache of https://www.wvnews.com/... The current page (https://www.wvnews.com/...) could have changed in the meantime. Last... Full version... Tip: To qualify for your search term on this page, press Ctrl+F or ⌘F (Mac) and use the find box.

Future of energy in Mountain State focus at W.Va. Energy Expo; solar, natural gas and coal experts weigh in



The 100N truck built by Energy Transportation LLC was among the vehicles and exhibits on display at the WV Energy Expo.

by Conor Griffith STAFF WRITER (https://www.wvnews.com/users/profile/Conor%20Griffith) On 6/28/2017

MORGANTHAU — At the West Virginia Energy Expo Wednesday, a panel shed light on the future of energy in the Mountain State and the perils that come from embracing multiple sources of energy.

West Virginia Coal Association President Bill Raney said the region's coal is still highly sought after, with plenty of reserves left, even though it's getting more expensive to reach. West Virginia remains the No. 1 user in underground coal production and No. 2 in overall production.

Raney also made the case that coal mining helps diversify economic activity, noting agricultural uses for reclaimed mine sites. He also cited the city of Marton and Mylan Park as examples of good mining land use.

And the U.S. military is looking at coming to West Virginia to use old mine sites for training and maneuvers, he said.

Because so many of the larger military bases are becoming subject to urban sprawl, Raney said it's more difficult to conduct large-scale live-fire exercises, particularly west of the Mississippi River.

Add the possibility of converting coal into liquid form and extracting raw earth elements from it, and coal has a bright future to offer, Raney said.

Charlie Burd, executive director of the Independent Oil & Gas Association of West Virginia, said the biggest gas natural gas field in the world is in the USGS has below the feet of those awaiting the expo.

Citing the potential development of ethane cracker plants, which help produce plastics from shale gas, he called development of the proposed Appalachian Storage Hub for liquid natural gas "absolutely crucial" for the state's future in terms of job creation and investment.

In view of downstream economic development, Burd urged all the industries connected to energy, such as engineering, environmental consulting and safety specialties, to get involved in their respective trade organizations to stay up to speed.

Kate Ireland, representing the solar nonprofit West Virginia Sun, said that while West Virginia ranks 40th among states for solar deployment, one-fifth of the state's 5.3 megawatts of solar power was installed last year alone.

The price for going solar, she said, has dropped by 64 percent in the past five years as technology improves. "It's definitely growing, but we've only scratched the surface," Ireland said. "The only way to go from here is up."

Xavier Walker of Energy Efficient West Virginia took a different approach, highlighting the dynamics of using less energy.

Through personal experience, Walker said he discovered the energy efficiency industry which helps residents and businesses save money by installing insulation and upgrading to better equipment in homes and facilities. Such improvements can even improve health outcomes in the long run, he added.

Employing such methods, Walker said, saved a chicken farm from going out of business. He also noted the high-carbon steel makes use of cost-saving technology.

The energy efficiency industry can seem offer job opportunities to laid-off coal miners, he said.

Walker referred to a study by West Virginia University that showed West Virginia could save \$250,000 a year if its state parks and buildings were made more energy efficient.

"That's money back into legislators' pockets or to programs that can put miners back to work," he said.

Raney acknowledged the relationship between the usually competitive coal and solar energy industries can be complex.

Examples he noted were using the flat land on old mine sites for solar panels or using energy-efficient technology and know-how in the mining process, which, despite some diesel-powered machinery, is mostly electricity-driven.

"Between it or not, it's a closed circle," Raney said reflecting on the fact that the energy producing sector is also one of the biggest energy consumers.

Staff writer Conor Griffith can be reached by at 304-395-3168 or by email at cgriffith@wvnewsjournal.com (mailto:cgriffith@wvnewsjournal.com)

Conor Griffith (https://www.wvnews.com/users/profile/Conor%20Griffith)