

The discussion focused on nuclear, wind and solar power -- sources of energy that do not contribute greenhouse gas emissions. All four congressmen stressed the need for diverse, reliable and affordable energy. Rep. Devin Nunes of Fresno chaired the event, which was called the San Luis Obispo Energy Summit and was sponsored by the House Republican Conference. The Cal Poly event is one of a series that are being held across the country.

Information gathered at these events will become part of the Congressional Record and will be used to draft new energy legislation, Nunes said.

Rep. Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield, whose district runs from San Luis Obispo to the Mojave Desert, said Central California's energy production is already diverse, ranging from Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant to wind farms in the Tehachapi Mountains as well as three proposed commercial solar plants in the Carrizo Plain.

Rep. Lee Terry of Omaha, Neb., said the nation will need to build 230 1,000-megawatt power plants of all kinds in the coming years to meet increased demand and help reduce dependence on foreign oil.

Democrats were quick to criticize the event as hypocritical. Andy Stone, Western regional press secretary for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said McCarthy uses events like the one at Cal Poly to give lip service to renewable energy.

Nuclear power featured prominently in the event. Scott Peterson, with the Nuclear Energy Institute, a nuclear advocacy group, said applications for 26 new nuclear reactors at existing plants have been filed. No new reactors are

planned for Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, and owner Pacific Gas and Electric did not participate in the event.

Two 1,600-megawatt reactors have been proposed by a group of entrepreneurs calling themselves the Fresno Nuclear Energy Group.

However, California law prohibits the construction of new nuclear plants until a permanent solution for the disposal of high-level radioactive waste is found.

Richard Egan of the Fresno group said the solution to that problem is to allow nuclear waste to be shipped to Japan and France, where it will be recycled. Those two countries have active reprocessing programs while the United States does not.

Several members of the audience questioned the feasibility of building new nuclear plants due to their expense and the fact that all their major components are manufactured overseas. A new reactor costs between \$6 billion and \$8 billion and requires from 10 to 15 years to build.

Several local renewable energy experts also testified at the hearing. Matthew Woods of San Luis Obispo-based REC Solar said his company specializes in installing solar panels in homes and businesses.

A solar system costs at least \$10,000 to install and provides electricity when it is needed most -- during the heat of the day. However, falling home prices are making it more difficult for homeowners to afford to install solar panels.

Patrick Lemieux, a mechanical engineering professor at Cal Poly, said the university is developing a wind power center where wind turbines are being assembled. They hope to deploy the first units this summer at a location five miles northwest of the main campus.

Rep. Bob Latta of Ohio was the fourth congressman to participate in the event.

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