



Thursday, December 21, 2006

Local News

- Skating in controlled ...
- Central seeks speech ...
- Roundup mine sued over ...
- Coal push worries ...
- Local engineering ...
- Tag helps find pets

Features

- How green co-op came out ...

Opinion

- Montana initiative and ...

Calendar

- Thursday, December 21
- Friday, December 22
- Saturday, December 23
- Monday, December 25
- Tuesday, December 26
- Wednesday, December 27
- Thursday, December 28
- Deadlines

Coal push worries environmentalists

By DAN TESTA
Community News Service
UM School of Journalism



EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is one of a series of stories on the upcoming legislative session.*

Despite the governor's outspoken support for developing multiple coal-fired generators and coal-processing plants throughout Eastern Montana, there's not much in his budget proposal about coal.

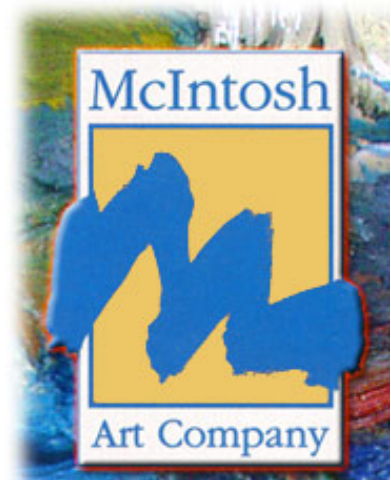
Senate Minority Leader Corey Stapleton, R-Billings, has a theory why.

"I think it's because he didn't want opposition from his own party," Stapleton said. "He was also waiting to see if he had control."

Energy policy – specifically coal development – promises to be central in the upcoming legislative session. It's an issue that could make for a strange dynamic, where the governor's attitude on coal is more hawkish than some in the GOP and far more aggressive than many in his own party.

"The session for us is going to be almost entirely about energy policy," said Jeff Barber, a lobbyist and water quality expert at the Montana Environmental Information Center. "Right now we see more bad things looming on the horizon than good things because of all the talk of new coal-fired power plants, coal-to-liquid plants and everything else."

Barber questions the scale of the governor's plans for coal-to-liquid and coal-fired power plants. He said the governor has yet to address issues like water usage, mercury emissions



How would you grade Brian Schweitzer's performance so far as Montana governor?

- A
- B
- C
- D
- F

[results](#)

Movies
· Playbill
· 'Eragon,' Hollywood ...
Deaths
· Tyler James Miller
· Evelyn L. Ullom
· Barbara Bird Hat
· Martha Sun Goes
Slow ...
· Dorene Gadde
Lindstrom
· Edith Watson
Campodonico
Classified
· Front Ads
· Antiques & Collectibles
· Building Materials & ...
· Business & Investment
· Computers & Usage
· Education &
Instruction
· Electronics & Cameras
· Satellite Equipment
& ...
· Employment
· Prof-Employment
· Financial Services
· Miscellaneous
· Pets & Supplies
· Religion
· Services Offered
· Wanted to Buy/Trade
· Farm & Ranch
Equipment
· Lots & Land
· Manufactured Homes
& Lots
· Rentals/Lease

and the viability of carbon sequestration at these proposed facilities.

Carbon sequestration is the process by which carbon dioxide, a main cause of global warming, is removed during the coal-gasification process and stored underground.

Evan Barrett, chief business development officer for the governor, said Montana shouldn't shy away from technology just because it's new. Montana has an opportunity to be a leader in the field of coal-gasification, he said.

"We want some of the plants in Montana to be among the first plants in the nation," Barrett said of the proposed coal-gasification plants. "If nobody ever does it, it will never be proven."

Barrett emphasized money for coal development will come from private investors, not taxpayers. The governor plans to introduce legislation that would create tax incentives for the construction of pipelines to carry biodiesel, coal-liquid and carbon for sequestration.

That legislation would include similar incentives for construction of transmission lines for "clean and green" power.

The governor's office is also considering ways to expedite the permitting process for coal development without weakening current standards. One suggestion under discussion, Barrett said, was temporarily beefing up staffing at the Department of Environmental Quality so more permits could be reviewed in less time.

Barrett anticipates many Democrats in the Legislature will be on board with the governor's plans because of the hundreds of jobs the coal development has the potential to create, particularly in those areas of eastern Montana not feeling the economic surge the rest of the state currently enjoys.

Stapleton anticipates a fight over coal development between the MEIC and the tag-team of Republicans and Schweitzer.

"If it doesn't turn out to be a fight, it will be the demise of the environmental community in Montana," Stapleton said. "And I think they're afraid of that."

Senate President Mike Cooney, D-Helena, said Democrats in the Legislature plan to promote renewable energy and make it more affordable.

"The governor has made it very clear that he has an aggressive agenda dealing with coal," Cooney said. "I'm not going to sit here and try to second guess what will happen in these debates and what the outcomes will be."



More Information

[Community Links](#)

[Outpost Archives](#)

[Search the Outpost](#)

[Buy Classifieds Online](#)

[Contact Us](#)

1 comments in [approval queue](#).



Want to help the Outpost?

· Roommate/Rooms to Rent

- Storage for Lease
- Autos & Vans
- Trucks
- Legal-Mierzejewski
- Legal-FLANZE
- Legal-Popovich
- Legal-Dill
- TRUSTEE SALE

Rep. Alan Olson, R-Roundup and chairman of the House Federal Relations, Energy and Telecommunications Committee, said he is optimistic that this is the session to work toward coal development. He predicted bipartisan support for such projects because of the jobs the power plants would create.

There also will be no shortage of investors from the private sector willing to develop coal-to-liquid and coal-gasification plants in Montana, Olson added. What's necessary is creating an inviting business climate and developing infrastructure for transmitting energy generated by the plants.

Special Section

Republicans may propose lowering the coal severance tax as a way to do just that, he said.

· Dear Santa Claus,

Stats

Incentives like the tax-exemption for coal sequestration equipment will court investment dollars, Olson said. But he acknowledges that the multiple lawsuits filed by the MEIC against permits for the proposed Bull Mountain coal-fired generators in Roundup are an effective deterrent for investors.

· STATS

School Lunch Menus

· Dec.22-28

Fits in Pieces

Barber is girding what could be a difficult legislative session for the MEIC.

· The Boiler Maker's ...

Letters to the editor

"We'd just like to see more effort being put behind clean, renewable energy that is cost-effective," he said. "I'd rather see that over any new coal-fire generation."

· Drug war aims at ...

· Long live Clawson

· Drug war worse than

Iraq

· Grotesque form of evil

In Tune

· T.J. Casey sings out

to ...

State & Local News

· Ag agenda focuses

on ...

· Ryegate pays fine to

DEQ

· A modest proposal:

Bring ...

Insider

· 1090 Club

Sports

- Calendar
- FREE tickets
- Central boys fall to ...
- Rams survive close game ...

Reading Roundup

- By KIDS, for KIDS

Follow the Money

- Follow the Money