

This state has what it takes to make its own electricity

Renewable energy is in our winds, fields and the sky above

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The people of the Palmetto State like to support their own, and with good reason. Patronizing South Carolina businesses and buying South Carolina products improves our state's economy, adds to its tax base and increases funds available to improve services for everyone who calls South Carolina home.

That's why it doesn't make sense that almost all of South Carolina's electricity is generated using sources from other states and even other countries. We burn coal from Kentucky and process uranium from Australia and Russia to light our state's homes and power its factories. Yet the land and waters of South Carolina hold the promise of a clean energy future and a stronger economy if we simply support and promote our homegrown energy resources instead of sending our local dollars and jobs to other places.

Our dependence on out-of-state energy sources is unsustainable, a security risk to our citizens and harmful to our beautiful environment. The risks to our state from failing to aggressively pursue clean energies today also include a dramatic redefining of our treasured coastline in years to come from the impacts of global warming.

That's why the question we must ask is not whether it's possible to produce renewable energy in South Carolina, but how much energy and how many new local jobs we want to create.

A first place to look is along our coasts. South Carolina's offshore wind potential is large and accessible. Developing a limited number of coastal wind farms -- on the Outer Continental Shelf far enough away from shore to be barely visible on the horizon -- could someday generate more electricity than South Carolinians use each year. A recent article in *The Greenville News* discusses how Santee Cooper, the Belle W. Baruch Foundation and the Clemson University Restoration Institute are collecting and studying data gathered from test stations to determine the full potential of winds near Georgetown.

Offshore winds can provide power for our state and our workers can continue to develop the wind turbines to harness that power. GE Energy's wind and gas-powered turbine production facility here in Greenville County already employs more 2,700 workers. If we were to meet just 10 or 15 percent of our energy needs through wind power, it would create more demand for wind turbines and an opportunity for GE and other companies to add more manufacturing jobs here in South Carolina.

South Carolina also has the potential to use waste from forest, crop and animal production to generate power. A recent report on biomass potential published by

researchers at Clemson University indicates that South Carolina has the near-term potential to generate about 3 percent of our electricity from forest and agricultural waste. Other studies and analyses suggest South Carolina has the long-term potential to meet as much as 8 percent of our current electricity demand with biomass.

Other options include additional hydroelectric and solar generation. New hydroelectric designs offer small-scale generation without constructing dams that would alter our rivers. Large-scale solar projects, such as the 300MW solar generation plant recently proposed by Florida Power and Light in the Sunshine State, hold great potential in our region. Some say solar isn't viable here, but the world leader in solar energy is Germany, which is hardly a sunny vacation destination.

So, how do we capitalize on these opportunities? We must break South Carolina's dependence on fossil fuels and create state and national standards to guide us towards clean energy alternatives.

A federal Renewable Energy Standard (RES) would provide a clear path. Earlier this year, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a federal RES that would require up to 15 percent of electricity to come from clean energy sources by 2020. If this standard becomes law, we will have the necessary incentives to lead the way with homegrown energy resources.

Embracing a clean energy future is critical for states like South Carolina. The damage that global warming would cause to our region's coastline through rising sea-levels and to our state's agricultural basis through changing weather patterns all suggest that South Carolina must lead the effort to reduce global warming pollution and transition to a clean energy economy. Gov. Mark Sanford is heeding that call by creating the state's Climate, Energy and Commerce Advisory Committee.

Now we need citizens and business owners throughout the state to urge their senators and congressional representatives to support a national Renewable Energy Standard as part of the final energy bill this fall. We must demonstrate that South Carolina already has what it takes to generate homegrown energy, reduce global warming pollution and create jobs for our citizens through renewable energy.

South Carolina's energy future is not waiting under the soil or sands of a distant state or nation. South Carolina's energy future is right here: in the winds off our coast, in the fields and forests of our state, and from the skies above us.