

Group to push for coal

Critic calls drive 'greenwashing'

By Tony Bartelme
The Post and Courier
Friday, November 30, 2007

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A pro-coal group called Americans for Balanced Energy Choices plans to spend as much as \$200,000 in South Carolina before the presidential primaries.

Using the slogan "clean coal, America's power," the group's goal is to persuade voters and the presidential candidates about the benefits of using new technology to "keep coal in the mix," according to one official with the group.

A conservationist called the campaign a "greenwashing scheme."

The pro-coal effort comes amid growing concerns about coal-fired power plants and the carbon dioxide and mercury they produce. Lawmakers are introducing new legislation to tax coal-fired power plants and other emitters of carbon dioxide. Santee Cooper, the state-owned utility, plans a proposed coal plant along the Great Pee Dee River.

Americans for Balanced Energy Choices is made up of coal industry interests, said Leah Arnold, communications director for the group. The group is financed by power companies, coal companies and coal-shipping interests. It thinks new technology to gasify coal and scrub emissions will protect the environment and improve the nation's energy security. The group was a sponsor of Wednesday's Republican presidential candidate debate on CNN.

The group plans to crisscross the state in a decorated "Flex Fuel" van and buy newspaper, online, television and radio ads. She said the group wants to raise the issue's profile as presidential campaigning picks up before South Carolina's primary. The national campaign's budget is \$8 million to \$10 million.

Dana Beach, executive director of the Coastal Conservation League, took issue with the group's name and goals. "This campaign is neither balanced nor about energy choices," he said. "I'm confident the public will see it for what it really is: a shameless greenwashing scheme funded by the coal industry designed to disguise the reality that coal is the dirtiest, most polluting energy source available."

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