Support Senate Bill 477 and House Bill 2729

The Coal to Clean Energy transition bill will move Oregon’s investor-owned electric utilities Pacific Power and PGE off of coal by 2025. The bill will work to create more local clean energy jobs and protect our climate by encouraging coal plant retirements. Instead of spending $295 million per year to pay for out-of-state coal energy, Oregonians can redirect their money to regional clean energy development.

The bill will:

• Set 2025 as the date to transition away from all coal use in Oregon’s electricity mix
• Ensure the replacement power for coal is 90% cleaner, allowing for a replacement mix that is primarily clean, renewable energy like solar and wind
• Encourage local clean energy to promote job growth in the region rather than elsewhere whenever possible
• Provide an incentive for utilities to retire coal plants and reduce carbon pollution

The bill will hold utilities accountable to create a serious regional coal transition plan. The Oregon Public Utility Commission will work with the utilities to create and carry out the plan to transition off of coal and significantly increase renewable energy generation in our region. For Oregon to prosper in a world where there are limits on carbon and other dangerous pollutants from coal plants, a transition to clean energy provides a clear path forward.

OREGON’S PROBLEM WITH COAL

Even though Oregon’s only coal-fired power plant is now slated to close in 2020, the state’s dependence on coal remains. Approximately one-third of the power used in homes and businesses in Oregon comes from coal-burning plants. Pacific Power, Oregon’s second biggest utility company, gets two-thirds of its energy from out-of-state coal plants. $295 million per year leaves Oregon to pay for out-of-state coal energy.

Utilities’ over-reliance on coal is putting customers at risk as the cost of coal power rises across the country. The Coal to Clean Energy transition will help relieve families and business from the climate and public health threats of coal. Instead of buying coal from out-of-state plants, Oregon’s utility companies will invest in clean energy sources that help create new jobs and support local economies.

OREGONIANS WANT CLEAN ENERGY

Recent polling conducted by Strategies 360 shows that 71% of Oregonians support the proposal to transition the state off coal to clean, renewable energy by 2025. This includes support from a majority of voters from all party affiliations. By a margin of more than three-to-one, voters say they would be more likely to support a candidate who favors the legislation. The proposal’s preference for renewable energy generated in-state to promote job growth receives nearly universal support with 88% in favor.

THE COAL TO CLEAN ENERGY TRANSITION IS AN AFFORDABLE WAY FORWARD

Oregonians are going to have to help pay for hundreds of million dollar upgrades to each aging coal plant that requires pollution controls. It is a better choice to invest in new clean energy that helps to provide local jobs and economic investment across the region.
Clean energy has already proven to be affordable and cost-effective. The cost of solar has dropped by 80% in the last five years, and wind energy contract prices have fallen by more than half since 2009. Utilities from Texas to Minnesota are contracting for solar because they have determined that it is now cheaper than natural gas, nuclear and coal. According to a recent banking analysis, electricity generated by solar already is or soon will be cheaper than average prices in 47 U.S. states, and a study by the Department of Energy found the states producing the most wind energy have seen electricity prices fall over the last five years, while prices have increased by close to 8% in other states over the same period.

The transition to clean energy is achievable, affordable and beneficial. For Oregon to prosper in a world where there are limits on carbon and other dangerous pollutants from coal plants, a transition to clean energy provides a clear path forward.

The bill mitigates potential short-term cost issues associated with transitioning from coal to clean energy by creating flexibility. If the Public Utility Commission determines the coal to clean transition would cause an electricity price spike in 2025, it may work with a utility to phase in its compliance between 2025 and 2030.

OREGON HAS ABUNDANT CLEAN ENERGY RESOURCES THAT HELP CREATE JOBS

In economic terms, the benefits of a transition to clean energy are undeniable. According to a recent report using Department of Energy data, solar employs more than four times as many people as coal based on the energy it provides. Renewable energy has already brought more than $9 billion of investment to Oregon, and the wind and solar industries combined have created an estimated 5,000 family-wage jobs throughout Oregon. These are well-paying jobs in fields such as engineering, construction and manufacturing that offer wages and benefits capable of supporting middle-class families.

Clean energy is a potent economic driver. More than $6 billion has been invested in 40 wind projects in Oregon, ranking the state fifth nationally in installed wind capacity. These projects generate enough electricity to power nearly 700,000 average homes. For farmers and other landowners, annual lease payments from wind projects have brought in more than $9 million. There are 128 solar manufacturing and installation companies in Oregon, employing 2,700 people. And we have yet to tap Oregon’s full clean energy potential. According to data from the Department of Energy, even a fraction of Oregon’s solar and wind resources could provide electricity to all Oregonians and allow the state to sell excess energy to other states. Meanwhile, there is more clean energy economic development in the pipeline. Oregon has more than 1,000 megawatts of clean energy projects that are already permitted and waiting to build. Removing the coal from our electricity mix opens up room for these job-creating clean energy projects.

ENDNOTES
1 The Vote Solar Initiative (http://votesolar.org/fact-room/fast-facts/)
3 http://bloom.bg/1tmGFaJ
4 Investment and jobs data either sourced directly from project reports and news feeds, or based on estimates from the U.S. Energy Information Administration’s April 2013 report, Updated Capital Cost Estimates for Utility Scale Electricity Generating Plants

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Visit www.protectourenergyfuture.org for more information.