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## State panel dealing with climate change

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COLUMBIA Four months after their appointment, a 29-member committee of business leaders, utility executives, environmentalists, politicians and others are voting on ideas they hope will prepare South Carolina for global climate change.

The ideas are not utopian nor are the participants idealists.

Suggestions thus far include adopting California's clean car standards, better enforcement of speed limits, developing new nuclear power, improving the design of government buildings, developing in-state biofuels production and awarding tax credits for efficient vehicles.

"South Carolina has a tremendous opportunity to be a global leader in addressing this issue and taking advantage of what could be tremendous economic benefits for the state," said Brad Wyche of Greenville, executive director of Upstate Forever, and a member of the committee.

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Gov. Mark Sanford appointed the Climate, Energy and Commerce Advisory Committee in April, asking it to compile a list of recommendations to improve the state's supply of renewable energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and better conserve energy.

The aim is to better prepare the state for global climate change, including global warming. Some scientists believe rising temperatures are the result of increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and that warming will lift sea levels, increase droughts and weather disasters.

That could translate into coastal damage as well as impacting the state's agriculture industry. Sanford said climate change also could impact the state's insurance costs and development.

South Carolina's greenhouse gas emissions, primarily from power production and vehicles, are rising much faster than for the nation as a whole, according to an analysis of emissions done for the committee.

From 1990 to 2005, emissions in South Carolina rose 38 percent, compared to an increase of 16 percent nationally from 1990 to 2004, according to the Center For Climate Strategies, a non-profit group helping the committee develop its plan.

Emissions increases in the state are projected to continue through 2020 unless the state acts.

Part of the group's work also could create economic development in South Carolina. Officials say production of biofuels such as ethanol, or "biomass" production using sources such as switch grass, could develop new industries in the state.

Wyche said the state already is advancing in the area of alternative fuels, with fuel cell research at the University of South Carolina and hydrogen research at Clemson's International Center for Automotive Research.

Leaders of the committee hope that its size and breadth will help convince lawmakers to adopt their recommendations.

The members represent a cross-section of government, industry, utilities, academia and environmental groups. Among them are Crandall Close Bowles, president and CEO of Springs Mills; Bill Timmerman, CEO of SCANA, one of the state's largest utilities; Ladd Hall, vice president and general manager for Nucor Steel; Dr. Marcus Dean, former dean for the Medical University of South Carolina and Dana Beach, executive director of the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League.

Technical working groups have already winnowed an original list of more than 250 possible ideas to about 55. They are spread across five general areas, including energy supply, transportation and land, agriculture and forestry, and residential, commercial and industrial.

The committee last week unanimously approved the recommendations of the agriculture and forestry technical panel. Among them were proposals to expand the supply of biomass feedstocks for production of electricity, heat or steam; development of advanced recycling and composting; reducing the rate of cleared forests; and conservation of working agricultural land.

The committee has not yet heard the proposals from the other four technical groups and must still wrestle with how to implement each idea, including its political and financial obstacles.

Heavy debate, members said, is expected on the energy-supply proposals, especially on recommendations dealing with reducing emissions and new nuclear power.

Wyche, who sits on the transportation panel, said he also expects some discussion of that panel's priorities aimed at cutting vehicle-related emissions.

"I don't know if that will be controversial in the group but it will be controversial elsewhere," he said.

The goal is to have a final report by next summer, giving members and the governor time to build support in the Legislature before the 2009 session.

Already, other states are at work at reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Ten states in the northeast have formed a cap-and-trade system designed to reduce green house gas emissions from power plants by 10 percent by 2019.

Last year, California enacted legislation to establish a cap-and-trade system in the state's whole economy to reduce emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

North Carolina lawmakers this summer passed a law requiring utilities to use renewable sources of energy and efficiency programs.

South Carolina's work has attracted the attention of the British government. Martin Rickerd, consul general in the government's Atlanta office, attended some of the committee's meeting last week and offered the resources and expertise of his government. Great Britain has committed to reducing emissions by 60 percent by 2050 and to obtain 20 percent of its electricity from renewable energy sources by 2010.

"It's a problem that affects us all," he told the committee. "No one country can do it on its own. It's a classic global problem that needs a global solution."

Sanford's climate committee has not been without its problems.

The group spent two hours at a recent meeting debating whether members not appointed to the committee but involved in the technical groups should get to vote, following confusion on procedures. About 60 to 70 people serve on the technical groups in addition to the appointed committee members.

The panel's Web site was temporarily placed out of service by hackers. It's chairman, Sen. John Courson, recently resigned.

But the new chairman of the group, Rep. Ben Hagood of Sullivan's Island, said he is pleased with the committee's work thus far and hopes lawmakers will pay attention to the final product.

"A lot of what we are talking about is conservation and frankly, it's about changing the way we live, how we can make positive decisions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions," he said. "I think if we have recommendations next year that have a strong consensus, then I think the legislature will be responsive."

Sen. Danny Verdin of Laurens, also a member of the committee, agrees.

"Considering what we are trying to accomplish, with so many vested interests, this unwieldy process is probably best and probably a microcosm of the legislative process," he said. "Seeing what I have so far in the working groups, I have no doubt we will be able to pick up and run with a significant portion of the agenda."

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