

The Day

New England Energy Coalition Hopes To Stir Debate To Boost Supplies

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Published on 6/7/2006

The New England Energy Alliance, a nonprofit coalition of business and trade groups, issued excerpts this week from an April debate about possible solutions to the region's appetite for energy.

“The region has a history of ignoring fuel diversity and investing in the fuel with the lowest price at any single moment in time,” said one participant, Henry Lee, director of the environment and natural resources program at Harvard University. “If diversity is as important as people claim, what is the region going to do to achieve it?”

The April 12 “New England Energy Roundtable” was intended to address potential natural gas and electricity shortages, obstacles to building new facilities and the impact of climate change and deregulated markets.

The coalition's forays into the public conversation about a looming energy crisis come as Connecticut lawmakers are pushing to pass an energy bill that could allow distributors like Connecticut Light & Power back into the business of generating electricity.

Public and private leaders concerned about the high prices of natural gas formed the alliance last year in hopes of influencing the public and corporate conversation about what methods of producing energy are feasible and palatable, alliance President Carl Gustin said Tuesday.

The alliance advocates for nuclear power and natural gas as reliable suppliers of energy, but does not promote individual projects, Gustin said. He is a former press director at the U.S. Department of Energy and a past executive at Nstar, a gas and electric distribution company.

The group predicts severe energy shortages in the region by 2010, if not sooner, particularly if new sources of energy are not developed. It will issue a comprehensive report in July on how the federal and state decisions to deregulate the electric industry are working out, Gustin said.

Alliance founders are concerned that new energy plants are not getting built, Gustin said. Residents oppose building new coal or nuclear plants. Challenges to alternatives like wind and solar power abound, and leadership is lacking, roundtable participants said.

Expanding the circle of decision-makers beyond the executive branches in the six New England states and including economic development commissioners could lead to more viable grass-roots solutions, said another expert, William Ellis, a former chief executive officer at Northeast Utilities and a lecturer in Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Science.

Dominion, the parent company of Millstone Power Station in Waterford, is one of 10 corporate alliance members. Dominion has no plans to build a new reactor anywhere in New England, according to Pete Hyde, the spokesman at Millstone.

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