Coal phase-out saves us on all fronts

By RYAN DOYLE

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

The recent Tribune article “Cap-and-trade bad for MU, Forsee says,” revealed that University of Missouri President Gary Forsee wrote a letter directly to federal lawmakers urging them to oppose comprehensive climate change legislation, or at least to “ensure that specific exemptions are included” for the biggest-polluting energy sources, such as coal.

As a community member who has worked directly with hundreds of MU students on cleaner-energy initiatives this fall, I have witnessed a lot of frustration and disappointment from students and faculty in response to Forsee’s letter, which inhibits strong and effective climate action and undermines imminent and necessary progress in moving towards clean energy at MU and across the nation.

Although the article made it sound as if Forsee represented the views of the broader University of Missouri campus, a closer look reveals that his views more accurately represent those of our nation’s most-polluting special interests. These views directly oppose the opinion of most students at MU and contradict previous promises made by Forsee’s own administration in regard to global warming and sustainability.

In Missouri, the “specific exemptions” Forsee requests would go directly toward maintaining an unfair advantage for dirty coal, which provides 85 percent of the state’s energy, rather than the clean-energy initiatives laid forth in last year’s passage of the Missouri renewable electricity standard, best known as Proposition C. Though it has spent millions on ‘clean’ coal advertising, the truth is the coal industry has for years actively fought against cleaning up the existing coal fleet.

Meanwhile, from coal ash and mining to soot and carbon pollution, coal remains one of Missouri’s dirtiest businesses. It imposes enormous costs on our health as well as significant environmental and social costs, such as the $62 billion in “hidden” costs a recent National Research Council study attributed to coal in the United States each year.

It is clear the industry will not clean itself up, and that is why strong regulations, including cap and trade, are vital to protect families and communities from coal’s dangerous side effects. Strong regulations also put us on a path to cleaner technology that will boost economic growth, create jobs and protect the planet. In fact, successfully meeting Proposition C’s 15 percent renewable electricity standard is expected to save Missourians $331 million over the next 20 years, according to Renew Missouri. Extended exemptions to Big Coal will only continue
provide Big Coal with an unfair advantage and inhibit Missouri’s transition to existing clean, renewable energy solutions.

Certainly, there is evidence that the University of Missouri is taking encouraging steps in favor of clean energy and climate action. Within the past year, the university has moved forward with plans to begin construction of a new biomass boiler next fall, has signed the president’s climate commitment and has hired a sustainability coordinator. Just as encouraging this semester was the vocalization of support by MU Chancellor Brady Deaton for student and faculty efforts at MU to move the university beyond coal.

However, the university has much to do still to transition to socially responsible energy sources, rapidly phase out the 183,000 tons of dirty coal it burns each year and to successfully follow through on its promise to become climate neutral. Forsee’s recent actions only threaten to hinder this urgent transition.

Forsee claimed that federal climate and energy legislation would be “bad for MU.” In reality, his letter was a huge misrepresentation of campus opinion and the facts around effectively transitioning to a cleaner energy future. Understandably, a lot of people at MU are disappointed and are wondering why Forsee would suddenly speak out against an issue that MU has frequently claimed leadership on. I would like to remind Forsee that his job is to represent the interests of the students, faculty and staff of the University of Missouri System, not the special interests of the biggest polluters in our nation, including Big Coal.

Ryan Doyle is an organizer with the Sierra Club who works with the Beyond Coal Campaign at MU.
Blunt, GOP colleagues defend Forsee in climate debate

By Bill Lambrecht

Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — After University of Missouri system president Gary Forsee declared opposition to cap-and-trade legislation, Democrats on the House Energy and Commerce Committee responded with a withering critique of Forsee’s claim that the bills would heavily burden his school.

In a memo last week to Missouri Reps. Ike Skelton and Russ Carnahan, committee chairman Henry Waxman, D-Calif., said that Forsee had failed to understand that the university’s power plant would be exempt from the anti-global warming legislation’s pollution provisions because of the small amount of electricity it sells on the grid.

The memo gave Forsee’s calculations the equivalent of an “F” in math, concluding that “it is evident that these estimates are inaccurate and significantly overstate the cost of the legislation ...”

The discussion moved swiftly to distinctly partisan terrain with the National Republican Congressional Committee responding that “West Hollywood taxman Henry Waxman rode in on his white horse to lend a hand to vulnerable Democrats Ike Skelton and Russ Carnahan ...”

The issue took a new turn this afternoon with Blunt and two Republicans on Waxman’s committee asserting that Forsee’s “underlying assumptions are correct.”

In a letter to Waxman, Blunt, along with Reps. Joe Barton of Texas and Fred Upton of Michigan, said that Democrats had disregarded the University of Missouri’s detailed analysis and relied on government studies rather than the darker projections from groups like the National Association of Manufacturers.

"Unlike committee Democrats, we believe such studies such as those completed by non-governmental organizations and businesses should be included in the economic debate surrounding climate change legislation,” the letter reads.

"MU’s administration is simply being fiscally responsible by forecasting what may be a worst-case scenario for its budgetary process in the next 20 years,” it adds.

"While it is encouraging to see a leader speak up on the negative economic consequences ... it is unfortunate that you chose to criticize these concerns with discriminating use of data and unreasonable economic assumptions.”
After receiving Waxman's letter, Forsee backed away from what he had described as "grave concerns" about the legislation and told the Columbia Tribune that he was "never not in support of cap-and-trade" but worried about the economic implications for his university.

Tags: Bill Lambrecht, Fred Upton, Gary Forsee, Henry Waxman, House Energy and Commerce Committee, Joe Barton, National Association of Manufacturers, National Republican Congressional Committee, Roy Blunt, university of Missouri
Blunt worried about cap-and-trade impact on MU

From Congressman Roy Blunt:

Blunt today backed University of Missouri President Gary D. Forsee's contention that the "proposed cap and trade model will significantly increase the energy expenditures for all four of our campuses..."

Forsee wrote a letter to the Missouri congressional delegation expressing his concern about the impact of the Democrats' cap and trade energy tax on the MU System.

Today, Blunt said:

"Just as the proposed cap and trade system will result in significant increased costs to all American households, the University of Missouri System will be unable to escape significant cost increases resulting from this legislation."
Save Universities From Cap-And-Trade

Here's an interesting argument against the Democrats' cap-and-trade bill: cost to universities.

That's the angle taken by University of Missouri system President Gary Forsee (formerly CEO of Nextel) and Rep. Roy Blunt (R-MO), who is currently running for Senate against Democratic Secretary of State Robin Carnahan.

Forsee declared his opposition to cap-and-trade in a letter to Blunt that "implementation is expected to increase electricity costs up to 50 percent and coal and natural gas costs by 30 percent or more" on campuses around the state. After Forsee raised the concerns, Henry Waxman's (D-CA) House Energy and Commerce Committee looked into his figures; Waxman concluded, in a letter to two Missouri Democratic congressmen, that "it is evident that these estimates are inaccurate and significantly overstate the cost of the legislation."

But Blunt is standing by him. Blunt said today (via The Kansas City Star's PrimeBuzz):

Just as the proposed cap and trade system will result in significant increased costs to all American households, the University of Missouri System will be unable to escape significant cost increases resulting from this legislation.
U.S. Rep. Roy Blunt sent a statement today saying he backs UM System President Gary Forsee's written contention that the proposed cap and trade bill will "significantly increase the energy expenditures for all four of our campuses."

And even though Forsee's letter apparently contained some errors -- such as incorrectly assuming MU's power plant was a "covered entity" -- the university, like all energy consumers, would be looking at increased costs under the legislation, Blunt said.

"Just as the proposed cap and trade system will result in significant increased costs to all American households, the University of Missouri System will be unable to escape significant cost increases resulting from this legislation," Blunt, a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, wrote in the prepared statement.

U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman, chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee responded to Forsee's letter, in part, by clarifying the proposed bill would not apply to MU's power plant because of the small amount of electricity it sells to the grid.

But that doesn't acknowledge various scenarios in which MU would have to purchase greenhouse gas allowances, such as if the university were to increase its generating capacity, Blunt said in his statement today.

Blunt, who is running next year for the seat Sen. Kit Bond is expected to vacate, has been weighing in on Forsee's letter since the Tribune originally reported in Nov. 25. That same day, his office sent me a copy of Blunt's response to Forsee, which thanked him for "sharing how the University of Missouri System will be impacted by this pending legislation," Blunt wrote in the original response, dated Nov. 25. "You are right to be concerned."
The other day I saw two political pundits on TV debating the reality of climate change and I was astonished. Glaciers are melting, a hurricane decimated New Orleans and most scientists concur that global temperatures continue to rise. While controversy and debate might sell well with the media, human-caused climate change has been widely recognized as the reality. Clearly, our world's climate is on a slippery slope to chaos.

Science has shown that the cause of these effects comes down to greenhouse gases, mainly carbon emissions. In the U.S., coal contributes nearly 40 percent of carbon dioxide emissions.

Simply put, coal equals carbon. With every light switch flipped, TV show watched, and adjustment of the thermostat, we are feeding the coal habit. We are feeding it with 183,000 tons of dirty coal a year here at MU, according to an interview I had with Energy Management in 2008. To put that in perspective, if you piled all that coal onto Faurot Field, that pile would be more than 150 feet high.

Many people will claim it's too expensive to move to renewable sources of energy. This has been shown to be false on a long-term scale or when including the externalities of coal. If you include the cost of miners' lives, destruction of environments and communities destroyed by mining, chemicals put into the air when coal is burned, and the way carbon emissions are throwing our climate into an erratic mess, it quickly becomes clear that using clean and renewable energy is by far the most economical option we have. It is also the only option that will improve our families' health, protect our climate and create permanent, sustainable job growth in our stagnant economy.
MU has made some noteworthy sustainability efforts of course, with some biomass fuels, natural gas and a new biomass boiler to be installed by 2012. Yet more than 80 percent of all the campus energy supply still comes from coal burned at the MU Power Plant, with even more being burned by our outside energy supplier.

The real concern with our energy consumption is that there is no plan or vision to ever stop burning coal. Chancellor Deaton said in a November Coal Free Mizzou meeting that he agrees with implementing clean sources of energy, but he won’t take the next step of commissioning a plan to phase out coal. Change won’t come instantly, but if we don’t take action now, the most destructive effects of coal will be inescapable.

Other schools are already moving beyond coal. The University of Wisconsin has begun the transition to move completely off coal to a combination of natural gas and biomass by 2012. Ball State University is moving completely to geothermal power. These solutions will massively cut carbon emissions at both schools, provide a greater mix of locally sourced biomass and geothermal energy, create new construction and clean energy jobs, and drastically cut air and water pollution from coal use.

Here at MU, we can help launch the clean energy revolution rather than hanging on to our dirty coal habits. Moving beyond coal at MU is a crucial step to show leadership for getting others to kick the habit, too. To do so, we need a strong commitment by Chancellor Deaton and the MU administration to move beyond coal by increasing investments in solar, geothermal, biomass, energy efficiency and conservation. These solutions exist today and could be employed immediately to reduce our dependence on coal in the short term and eliminate its use entirely as quickly as possible.

Let’s take the lead in moving beyond coal, starting right here at Mizzou.

*Paul Rolfe is the faculty coalitions coordinator for the student group Coal Free Mizzou.*
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU professor writes guide to help autistic adults find jobs

By Lindsay Moser
December 9, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Jeremy Jacobi, 22, was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome when he was 16 and is slowly building the skills he needs to live on his own and support himself financially.

"It's been extremely difficult for me to get a job, to market myself and stand out from other people," he said.

Jacobi is part of a large group of people with an autism spectrum disorder, which can hinder a person's ability to communicate and socially interact. Many people with these disorders have difficulty finding and maintaining employment.

Scott Standifer, an MU clinical associate professor in the School of Health Professions, has created a guide to help change that.

Standifer said because adults with Asperger's syndrome and high functioning autism tend to be more vocal and get more of what he called "scholarly attention," he mainly wanted to address employment issues for people who have little or no communication skills.

"These individuals face the most significant challenges, and what works for them should also be relevant for people with Asperger's," he said.

Standifer's guide aims to make sure the adult autistic community isn't forgotten.

Jacobi has a strong interest in computer technology and has applied his skills through an internship with MU's athletics department in information technology and at his prior job at Columbia Computer Center.
But Jacobi said some of his behaviors in the workplace were not tolerated.

"A lot of times, I spoke my mind without thinking about if I was hurting other people's feelings," he said.

Staci Bowlen, the director of the Columbia branch of TouchPoint Autism Services, a program that provides services to people with autism spectrum disorders, said adults with autism typically face challenges such as communicating with customers and knowing what is appropriate to say in interviews and on the job. She said she has noticed there isn't much information made available to help them find employment.

"Everything surrounds children," Bowlen said. "What people don't see is that this child grows up."

Standifer previously worked with a team of professionals to write a guide called "The Handbook of Disabilities." But when recently looking back at that guide, he noticed a lack of information on adults with autism spectrum disorders and their struggles in the workplace. So he updated the handbook and wrote his own guide titled, "Adult Autism and Employment: A Guide for Vocational Rehabilitation Professionals."

Standifer's guide mainly provides information for vocational rehabilitation agencies, which are state-run employment programs to help people with disabilities obtain meaningful careers and live independently.

"Ultimately, the goal is to help the folks with autism get jobs and live out in the community," Standifer said. "These folks want to work, and it's our job to help them achieve that."

Standifer said the guide aims to be specific on the characteristics of autism and how they can influence a person's effectiveness in the workplace. In turn, providing these characteristics to vocational rehabilitation professionals will allow them to assess the needs of the person with autism and learn how to accommodate such needs.

"I hope they take away a more grounded understanding of what living with autism can be like for the individuals and the kinds of questions to ask as well as the kinds of support to offer to people with autism," Standifer said.
The guide offers suggestions such as interview accommodations, initial questions to ask in an interview, a list of potential career options and possible job accommodations.

James Emmett, a rehabilitation counselor in Monticello, Ind., who works with employment issues specific to people with developmental disabilities and autism, advised Standifer on his new booklet. He said the guide provides a new perspective for these vocational rehabilitation agencies.

"For so long, people with autism have in essence been often set up for failure in vocational rehab centers," Emmett said. "For example, interviews can be really difficult for people with autism. This guide changes that. It can make or break the ability to serve a person with autism."
Chancellor and wife open home for holiday party

December 7, 2009 by Lindsay Moser

Candelight illuminated various parts of MU Chancellor Brady Deaton's home, known as the Residence on Francis Quadrangle.

Poinsettia, candles, and wreaths were just a few of the decorations adorning the Residence on Francis Quadrangle, otherwise known as the home of MU Chancellor Brady Deaton and his wife, Anne.

The Deatons, along with MU Provost Brian Foster and his wife, Lerke, hosted a holiday open house tonight that allowed faculty, staff and students to mingle while admiring the beauty of the house.

"Isn't it beautiful?" asked Brady Deaton, referring to the decorations throughout his home. He said he was looking forward to spending time with his family over the holidays as well as making a trip to Houston to cheer his beloved Tigers in the Texas Bowl.

Anne Deaton said the house was filled with decorations acquired from others throughout the years as well as their own personal items.

"It makes it feel like family," she said.

Sarah Reid, the event coordinator for the residence, was in charge of decorating and working with caterers for this year's open house. She said she was happy with the final product.

"It looks festive and together," she said, "It was the kickoff to our season."
Delicious treats such as brownies and cookies adorn a table in the Deaton's home.

MU senior Josh Heffernan said the house itself fascinates him.

"It's just interesting to me because the house has so much history, yet people are living in it," he said.

The three-story brick house is the oldest building on campus and various prominent figures such as Mark Twain, Harry S Truman and Eleanor Roosevelt have visited throughout the years.

Two MU trinkets rest on a lectern once used by Mark Twain.
NFL includes University of Missouri in $1.5 million donation

Wonder where all that money the NFL collects in fines ends up?

Much of it goes to NFL Charities, which continues to spread the wealth.

NFL Charities, the charitable foundation of the NFL, has awarded $1.5 million in grants to support sports-related medical research at 11 organizations, including the University of Missouri and Washington University in St. Louis.

The University of Missouri School of Medicine received $120,000 for a study on diagnosing and treating injuries to the meniscus cartilage in the knee.

Since 2000, NFL Charities has committed more than $20 million in grants to medical facilities nationwide to address issues including studies on mild traumatic brain injury, ACL injury prevention and heat stress risks.

Overall, the NFL has spent more than $5 million to research concussions and other brain injuries during the past decade, including the NFL Charities grants in this area.

A four-member panel of medical experts evaluate and recommend grantees each year that must be approved by the NFL Charities board. This year’s grants include studies on knee biomechanics, artery blockage in retired players and stem cell usage for tendon repair.

"NFL Charities Medical Research Grants strive to make the game of football and all athletics safer by supporting a broad range of the best sports-related medical research proposals," said Vanderbilt University head team physician DR. Kurt Spindler, who is the chairman of the NFL Medical Grant Committee. "The goal is to look at some of the many risk factors that exist not only for football players, but in all athletics."
The Washington University School of Medicine was granted $80,000 for a study on ACL injuries.

"The award from NFL Charities this year is especially meaningful as it helps to further the work of the MARS (Multi-center ACL Revision Study) group, which is an 87 surgeon multicenter trial," said Dr. Rick Wright, Principal Investigator at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. "The work we are doing would have struggled to continue without this support."

A $124,000 grant to the University of South Florida will go toward a study on heat-stress risks.

"This grant from NFL Charities means more than just another funded research project to us. It means we are one step closer to being able to protect youth, collegiate and professional athletes who participate in sports in the heat," said Dr. Eric Coris, Associate Professor, Director of Primary Care Sports Medicine at the University of South Florida.

Formed in 1973, NFL Charities is a nonprofit organization that enables the league to contribute collectively to charitable causes on a national level. NFL Charities, which has approved more than $120 million in grants to more than 600 different organizations, approves grants annually to support sports-related medical research, youth health programs, and the charitable work of current and retired NFL players.

Here are the 11 recipients of NFL Charities grants:

Baylor College of Medicine
Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center
Cleveland Clinic Foundation
Georgia Institute of Technology
Oregon Health & Science University
Rush University Medical Center
University of Missouri, Columbia
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
University of California-Davis
University of South Florida College of Medicine
Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis