

Rep. Sloan Tours North Dakota Energy Centers

Rep. Tom Sloan (R, Lawrence) was one of eight state legislators from across the U.S. to participate in a National Conference of State Legislatures' (NCSL) Energy Supply Task Force tour of energy centers in North Dakota. NCSL is a non-partisan professional organization that supports state legislators through educational and networking opportunities.

The North Dakota tour included visits to a coal gasification plant, lignite coal mine and power plant, natural gas generation plant, oil well drilling rig, reclaimed well and coal production sites, a hydraulic fracturing job site, and a railroad oil loading facility. "North Dakota has a broad range of energy supply sources and the NCSL tour was ideal for discussing the mix of fuels necessary to meet U.S. needs and maintain affordability," Sloan said. "North Dakota also has large amounts of wind generation and major electric transmission lines and needs."

Lignite coal is a low BTU fuel that has less energy than the Powder River coal from Wyoming that fuels Kansas' coal-fired generation units. Placing the synthetic gas plant and an ethanol production unit in close proximity to the mines and generation plant made for economic and environmental synergies.

The Bakken oil field in Western North Dakota is the fastest growing domestic oil production field. The small towns within the field are experiencing rapid growth in population, congestion, construction, and production. Some of the oil from the field is shipped to refineries by pipeline, but much of it travels by railroad. Railroads offer greater flexibility to the owners of the oil because it can be shipped to any refinery in the country needing supply. Pipelines are less flexible in changing delivery schedules to meet needs because pipelines are point-to-point carriers.

"Seeing the oil boom first hand gives me a better sense of the need for Kansas communities to plan early for growth related to energy production or any other economic driver," Sloan said. "Trying to construct water and sewer lines, streets, schools, housing, and the other aspects of community life after the boom starts creates problems similar to some of those Junction City saw with the return of the Big Red One from Germany. Planning and zoning make a real difference in a community's ability to integrate economic growth."

The Tour included conversations with the people who actually drill the oil wells about how directional drilling and hydraulic fracturing work. It also provided opportunities to discuss whether Bakken oil is more volatile than other sources (it

is not according to state tests), railroad and pipeline safety, air emissions from oil and coal production, and reclamation of mining and construction sites.

Rep. Sloan is Chairman of the Vision 2020 Committee and a member of the U.S. Department of Energy's Electricity Advisory Committee and the GridWise Architecture Council. He is serving his tenth term in the Kansas Legislature.

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