

## Nebraska a winner in next energy phase

Wednesday, Nov 12, 2008 - 08:36:07 am CST

In the same week that the nation chose Sen. Barack Obama as its next president, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln hosted a symposium on “National Climate Change Legislation and Opportunities for Nebraska.”

The timing was auspicious.

One of the first things that Obama is expected to focus on — after the economic crisis — is energy. Many observers expect him to relaunch the sort of comprehensive energy package that stalled in Congress this year.

As a presidential candidate, Obama proposed that the United States derive 10 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2012.

One prime opportunity for Nebraska is wind energy. The state ranks sixth in the nation in potential. Another is in continued development of cellulosic ethanol, which is made from plants such as switchgrass. The state already has the nation’s fourth largest amount of crop residue, according to symposium speaker David Hawkins of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Hawkins said that a national investment of \$100 billion — less than the economic stimulus program passed earlier this year — steers about \$581 million to Nebraska and would create nearly 13,000 new jobs in the state, according to a report by the University of Massachusetts Political and Economic Research Institute.

John McClure of the Nebraska Public Power District said a federal Department of Energy study on the feasibility of producing 20 percent of the nation’s electricity by wind by 2030 showed the state would reap \$8.9 billion in economic benefit if the goal were achieved. He said the effort would create 26,000 local construction jobs and 3,600 long-term jobs.

One of the biggest investments required in Nebraska would be in construction of transmission lines to carry electricity generated in wind farms to markets elsewhere in the country.

Also offering opportunity is the proposed cap-and-trade system to reduce carbon emissions. Hawkins and others have suggested that farmers could be paid for low-carbon practices such as no-till agriculture.

Most of these proposals have been bandied about for years, of course.

But it looks as though some of them soon will become reality. There was a noticeable spring in the step of advocates such as David Hawkins who feel they are on the verge of seeing enactment of new energy policies after years of dithering in Washington.

Nebraska was never a player in the oil industry. But it has the potential to play a big role in renewable energy. State and local officials, as well as the private sector, should be prepared and ready to take advantage of the coming boom.