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Clean coal forum comes to St. C.

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ST. CLAIRSVILLE — The Ohio Senate Democratic Caucus Listening Tour made a stop at Undo's Monday, as Ohio Sen. Jason Wilson joined several local officials, state officials and representatives from the coal and power industries for a forum on clean coal technology.

The bulk of the conversation focused on the potentials the technology can have for the state in terms of jobs and economic development.

Among those making up the panel were Wilson, Neeraj Gupta, Battelle manager for Midwest Regional Carbon Sequestration Partnership Field Demonstration Projects Battelle is building a working carbon sequestration facility with First Energy at the R.E. Burger Plant in Shadyside.

Representing the governor's office was District 10 Regional Economic Development Director Lisa Duvall. Harold Erdos represented the United Mine Workers and Mike Jamison represented the Ohio Valley Coal Association. Representing Belmont County on the panel were Sue Douglass, Belmont County Community Investment Corp. director; and Larry Merry, Belmont County Port Authority director.

Also on the panel was Rick Shriver, a Morgan County commissioner, who said his county has been trying to rebound ever since its largest employer, a coal mine, closed down.

According to Wilson, there are some leaders in the state government who don't understand the need for coal, a perception he said he is trying to change with positive implications for the entire state.

"It's not the clean coal, but the science behind the technology that is our future," Wilson said.

Along with the direct creation of mining jobs, the technology is expected to create spin-off industries and reduce the nation's dependence on foreign energy.

Wilson also said there are some in state government who still think of coal as a "dirty" resource, but current projects are making the resource cleaner.

According to Gupta, removing sulfur, mercury and other elements from coal isn't enough to make coal a clean technology, but there also needs to be a way to capture carbon dioxide, which is believed to be the primary cause of global warming.

Gupta went on to say some of the issues facing carbon sequestration include geological conditions, such as the type of rock located underground and the amount of seismic activity. Based on those considerations, the local area was one of the reasons why Battelle is testing the technology at the R. E. Burger Plant.

To test the viability of the sequestration method, the Shadyside plant has been chosen as one of the test sites for the project currently being conducted by the Midwest Regional Carbon Sequestration Partnership and the U.S. Department of Energy's National Energy Technology Laboratory. The program is headed by Battelle, which is headquartered in Columbus. The U.S. Department of Energy is providing much of the funding for the \$24 million project which is currently under way.

Questions regarding other methods of renewable energy sources, including wind power, were discussed.

According to Duvall, Ohio has only a few locations throughout the entire state that are suitable for wind power, but said the state has other options, including building the windmills that could be used in other parts of the country.

According to Jamison, the local coal industry is also seeing some increases as a result of some regulations, including scrubbers at plants that makes coal a viable option when it comes to providing power. He also said, however, that today's mining is a highly technical field and that there is a need for skilled workers. He also eluded to the need for safety to be a top priority, something Erdos expanded on.

Douglass then said she is working on bringing a new mine rescue facility to Belmont County, which could include a mine safety school, while Merry said the potential economic benefits for Belmont County was high.

"We've got the roads, we've got the river, we've got the rail and we've got the coal," Merry said. "This isn't coal, this is East Ohio gold."

This was the second in a series of seven, statewide public forums by members of the Ohio Senate Democratic Caucus.

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