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Take Leadership Where You Can Find It

Posted on [June 20, 2011](#) by [admin](#)

By Mark Mizrahi, President and CEO, Enlink Geoenergy Services

The prospects for a comprehensive national energy policy that shifts the U.S. dramatically toward renewables seem to shrink with each day that we get closer to the 2012 elections. Amity and collegiality are not renewable resources in Washington, D.C., and right now there simply isn't enough of either to permit Congress to deal with anything as complex as energy.

As the CEO of a company that has built more than 100 geothermal heat pump systems in states from the Pacific to the Atlantic, the lack of a coherent energy policy at the federal level would be depressing if we weren't so busy keeping abreast with all the progress being made at the state and local level. While the feds talk endlessly about doing something someday, states, counties, cities and utilities are making things happen now.

Today there are more than 30 states with a renewable portfolio standard (RPS) of one sort or another. Five states have voluntary programs, but more than 25 states have requirements that range from Maine's 40 percent to Pennsylvania's 8 percent. Just two months ago, California's increased its 20 percent RPS to 33 percent. It took nearly two years to get the law passed and signed by the governor, but it is now law for the country's biggest state. The state has set a 2030 deadline for meeting the new goal.

Cities have also been a great source of leadership when it comes to going green. Dozens of cities, large and small, have adopted green building codes or energy efficiency requirements. Cities like Los Angeles, New York, Boston, Austin, Chicago, Seattle, Oak Park Illinois, and Atlanta just to name a few, have adopted some kind of green building programs. One good example of local action is the City of Phoenix, which recently adopted its own "green building" code. According to The Arizona Republic, the program will award points for environmentally friendly features and will award bronze, silver, gold or emerald status based on how many points are accumulated. The voluntary code requires a minimum of two percent on-site generated renewable energy, and encourages the use of highly-efficient technologies, such as geothermal heat pump heating and air conditioning systems.

California was the first state in the nation to develop a "green" building code, which went into effect on January 1, 2011. In the meantime, Oregon and New Mexico have also adopted green building codes, as have local governments around the country. While these codes don't necessarily require renewable energy, they are indicative of a need and a desire to "build green."

I'm hopeful that these state and local efforts will continue, and even broaden over the coming months, but there are troubling signs this may not be the case because of political interference, the way we've observed it at the federal level. In New Mexico, for instance, there are efforts to overturn the green building code that was implemented just last year after several years of work. We have seen ballot initiatives trying to strike down renewable standards and emission reduction standards in different states.

This is a time to pour on the green, not cut it back. The green sector of our economy is one of the few bright spots during these days of depressing economic numbers. We should build more effective energy efficiency programs, continue our

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support of renewables, and implement those measures which will benefit the country's economy, environment and global competitive position.

Faced with what amounts to a national energy crisis, we need leaders to step up with the vision and sense of purpose that will get the entire country moving in the same direction on energy policy in general, and renewables, in particular. If the country isn't moving forward, it's moving backward; there is no standing still. And as positive as all the state and local work is, it will take a strong leadership on the national level to find the big-picture, long-term solutions to our energy problems.



Mark Mizrahi is President and CEO of EnLink Geoenergy Services, Inc., a design-build contractor of geothermal heat pump systems. Mr. Mizrahi is co-chair of the Renewable Energy, Green Building and Energy Efficiency Committee for ACORE, and sits on the Leadership Council.

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