

A Shared Responsibility: Developing Renewable Energy in America and Around the Globe

By Maryruth Coleman, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires

As the price of oil continues to push upwards and the world's natural resources are further depleted, the United States and Slovenia appear more aligned than ever on the need to develop renewable energy sources. Speaking before the European Parliament on January 24, Minister of Economy Andrej Vizjak identified energy as one of five priorities of the Slovenian EU Presidency. Minister Vizjak said that energy security would remain a global priority over the coming decades, and he spoke of the need to promote energy sustainability through the development of new energy technologies. President George Bush reiterated the significance of renewable energy development just four days later in his State of the Union address, saying "our security, our prosperity, and our environment all require reducing our dependence on oil." Indeed, the need for coordinated and decisive action on energy security is imperative for sustainable growth in the future.

Renewable energy presents us with a rare opportunity to make a substantial, positive impact on our world and the generations that will follow. We are already seeing the potential of renewable energy. Hydropower plants driven by flowing water operate at more than twice the efficiency of fossil fuel plants. Wind energy is the fastest growing renewable energy technology around the globe, and the Department of Energy estimates that good wind areas have the potential to supply more than one and a half times the current electricity consumption of the United States. Ethanol—a fuel that was only familiar to energy industry insiders just a decade ago—is now a common and readily available additive at gas stations across America.

As we celebrate this impressive growth, however, it is clear that we are only at the beginning of a challenging and exciting path. We've overcome some of the most difficult hurdles, but there are more hills to climb before renewable energy becomes a mainstream technology. For instance, our infrastructure has been designed for the transportation, distribution, and use of fossil fuels; and renewable fuels require different constructs. Cellulosic ethanol is not yet commercially available on a large scale. Emerging technologies like ocean energy and solar photovoltaics are not yet cost-competitive against mainstream energy sources.

These are significant challenges, but the United States government believes that renewable energy is worth the time and investment it will take to overcome them.

Renewable energy is a national priority; as such, it requires a cohesive and coherent national policy. Since the beginning of the Bush Administration, the federal government has provided \$18 billion dollars often partnering with the private sector to research, develop, and market renewable energy technology. But developing clean, renewable technologies is a goal that reaches beyond our borders. This must be a global effort, for we all share the same planet and must all share in the responsibility for its

health. In the State of the Union, President Bush charged us with completing an international agreement to reduce greenhouse gases and mitigate climate change.

The Departments of State, Energy, Agriculture, Commerce, Interior, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the United States Agency for International Development, and the White House Council on Environmental Quality, are pleased to help advance these goals by gathering together renewable energy authorities from industry, academia and government for the Washington International Renewable Energy Conference, or WIREC 2008. Agriculture, Energy, Environment, and Foreign ministers from more than 100 countries will gather in Washington to share policies and best practices for renewable energy development.

From March 4-6 in Washington, DC, critical components for a major and rapid scale-up in global renewable energy use will be together in one place, building on the previous global renewable energy conferences held in Bonn (2004) and Beijing (2005). Cabinet-level officials will have the chance to interact with academia, non-profits, and industry executives from all sectors of the renewable energy industry.

WIREC will present a comprehensive approach to renewable energy development, focusing on four pillars that will support a successful industry: agriculture and rural development; technology, research and development; market adoption and financing, and state and local authorities.

Participants will have the opportunity to make voluntary pledges outlining the actions, measures and policies they will undertake to increase renewable energy use worldwide. We are also developing a searchable database of best practices in renewable energy development, to foster international collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

It is my hope that we will come away from this conference with increased understanding and enhanced relationships. It is only through international cooperation that we will succeed. I ask my colleagues from around the globe to join us in this effort and help revolutionize the way we power our world.

The time has come for renewable energies to become mainstream technologies. Slovenia has shown through its EU Presidency efforts to promote renewable energy that it shares the United States' goal of strengthening energy security through the use of new technology. Let us join together and make this goal a reality.