

December 2010

Fall Symposium Springs Opportunity

The American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) Fall Symposium can be a good event to attend if you are interested in the latest industry insights and reconnecting with colleagues and friends. The promise of this year's symposium was no different; however the timing of the event had me especially intrigued. Arriving on the heels of the November elections and a long year of dominating headlines touting domestic energy infrastructure issues, I was anxious to hear some perspective on the new political landscape's effect on the wind industry.

The event didn't disappoint. In fact, I left with a feeling that the future of the industry was ripe with opportunity. The panels were interesting, conversations were insightful, and opportunities for networking were plentiful. The highlight of the symposium was the keynote speaker, former Secretary of State General Colin Powell. His comments about the importance and "nobility" of developing renewable energy for national vitality, security, and international benefit were energizing. Powell's words were referenced and repeated by many of the attendees during the remainder of the event. Now only if we could get the politicians to join in.

Inspiration and energy aside, I am a realist. The wind industry faces many challenges, even in a good year. At first glance, the recent changes in political seats, a weak economy, and a renewed push for federal fiscal austerity do not bode well for wind energy. It was promising to hear that the political discussion panel at the symposium evaluated these and other factors and had some practical strategies to share.



- There is an opportunity (an imperative, really) for AWEA to re-craft its message to legislators in pursuit of the wind industry's goals in such challenging conditions.
- Thirty states still have renewable portfolio standards that are driving wind development forward, even in the absence of a federal RES.
- Utilities are actively building new infrastructure that will enable greater wind integration and reduce costly congestion.
- The more polarizing, and arguably much less productive platforms of global warming and energy independence (an unfeasible goal, to paraphrase General Powell) have been shelved in favor of promoting the wind industry as an essential component of a strong and thriving economy, regardless of the political setting.

Considering these strategies, I felt the AWEA Fall Symposium was again worthwhile. Our industry has survived many challenges in the past decade. The hope for the future is our ability to change, get our message out, and look for guidance from AWEA to keep our business strong.



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