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## We take electricity for granted

Kentucky has faced extreme hardship this week and last without the electricity that provides the light and heat we so desperately need in the winter. I've seen the Kentucky Utilities' crews, emergency workers and other repairmen throughout the night in bitter cold working to restore power to the many Kentucky homes without electricity. They deserve our deepest thanks.

We take electricity for granted until we don't have it or until we can't afford it. In Kentucky, 93 percent of our electricity comes from coal. We have the fourth lowest electric rate in the nation, thanks to coal.

During these tough economic times, the coal industry is one of the very few industries generating positive income for the state in terms of jobs and tax revenue. In 2008, coal generated \$49 million more in severance tax than predicted for state and coal county use, because the price of coal had risen in 2008.

We get criticized for our use of the term "clean coal." "Clean coal technologies" was a term used by Congress more than 20 years ago and is not a recent creation. It was never meant to apply to carbon dioxide capture and storage, but research on this is currently under way. With the addition of clean coal technologies, today's power plants are 70 percent to 90 percent cleaner than the plants that are being replaced. We are close to eliminating the historic contributions to acid rain and smog.

The coal industry does not disparage other forms of energy -- natural gas, nuclear, hydro or renewables. They all play a key role in providing our state and nation with electricity. The new University of Louisville Center for Renewable Energy Research and Environmental Stewardship will help devise ways to harness renewable energies like wind and solar here in Kentucky. This research is sorely needed because the wind power in Kentucky is only rated as marginal (see <http://windeis.anl.gov/guide/maps/map2.html>) and that is strictly in Eastern Kentucky.

One of our members has looked into the feasibility of placing wind turbines on the tops of reclaimed surface mines in Eastern Kentucky and is still very much interested. He thinks it is a very viable land use after mining and reclamation.

Solar panels can help supplement the household electricity needs, but their cost effectiveness makes them unaffordable for the middle class. This will change in the future when advancements are made in efficiency and affordability.

Midwest states and southeastern states are heavily dependent on coal. Global warming legislation will raise their electric rates to reach parity with the New England states and California. Our loss is the attraction of industry to states with low electrical costs. Our steel plants and auto plants with their many spin-off industries will be in jeopardy. Our other loss will be to the poor and elderly when they can no longer afford dependable electricity for lights, heat and cooling.

But for today and the near future, in addition to providing thousands of Kentucky jobs, low rates and income to our state, the next time you are with or without electricity, remember that your electricity originated from coal.

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