

In My View: Don't buy 'clean' coal arguments

By **DIANE LOPEZ HUGHES**

As a parish nurse minister, it is a health concern that the people I serve, as well as our community in general, are seriously affected by the global climate crisis — probably the biggest public health threat facing us in this century.

With that fact in mind, any promotion of funds for energy research and development, job training and employment needs to consider the full cost of the end product — not only the cost to consumers, but all that the public will pay. These include costs to our health, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and all of life as we know it. The media and lobbyists alike do a great disservice to the community when they gloss over these realities.

The latest Illinois Commerce Commission report on the Tenaska project highlights the monetary cost: It will cost energy users 30 percent more for electricity from this plant than from traditional coal plants. Not only do they say that the design for carbon sequestration is incomplete, but the future benefits are uncertain and unproven. While clean wind energy costs anywhere from \$88 to \$127 per megawatt, “clean” coal energy from the Tenaska plant would cost approximately \$212. Which type of energy can you afford?

Just as important, while new coal and gas technology continue to be bankrolled, much-needed resources are being diverted from an essential increased commitment to alternative, safe and sustainable sources of energy: the type of energy that will not wear out or sicken its recipients. Will the new technology go online before coal and gas run dry? Will it be able to reduce costs when coal and gas become increasingly more and more costly because of increasing difficulty of extraction? And what about other critical areas like education, job training, jobs, industry and the infrastructure to support truly clean energy of the future?

Tenaska claims that construction of the plant could create up to 2,500 jobs. The STOP (Stop Tenaska Overpriced Power) Coalition response bears repeating: Those gains would be offset by job losses of 15,000 to 35,000, depending on the actual cost of the plant, due to the “unattractive energy cost profile for business that will be a major deterrent to investment and job creation.”

So as city, county, state and federal government fiddle while coal burns, and the media and dirty energy promoters suggest that jobs at any cost are worth the consequences, what can concerned folks do?

Be suspicious of any information prepared by gas, oil or coal lobbyists or their political friends. Research the origin and boards of directors of energy organizations touting themselves as “clean.” Do as much as our schoolchildren should be doing in their classrooms: learn about safe, renewable, non-carbon-based energy alternatives and what our communities can do to promote their research and development and subsequent use, as well as job creation and training connected with them.

Trust your intuition that what looks dirty is dirty and obviously not conducive to your health or the health of any living thing. Then demand that your state representatives do the same.

Diane Lopez Hughes is a community member of The State Journal-Register editorial board.