

Remarks of Senator Don White
DEP listening session.

As a state legislator and as a member of the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee, I appreciate and understand the challenge before you as you consider the development of a program for the Commonwealth in response to EPA's proposal to regulate Greenhouse Gases from existing power generation facilities.

I also appreciate and want to thank you for holding this session to give interested parties an opportunity to present their viewpoints on this issue. Having chaired more than a few public hearings and having sat through many more as a committee member, I know how important -- and often tedious -- of a task these sessions can be.

As you work to develop a program, I would urge the Department to be pragmatic in whatever steps it ultimately decides to take.

Certainly we don't know what EPA's proposal is going to look like and we don't know what EPA is going to ask our state to do in this area.

It is essential that the Department recognize that whatever EPA proposes, its response to it has widespread real life implications for the workers and economy of the Commonwealth.

Thousands of jobs, livelihoods and investments are at stake.

The decisions you make will directly impact many families across the Commonwealth.

As a case in point, consider the Homer City Power Station in my senatorial district.

Thousands of people rely upon the continued operation of this base-load coal-fired power plant. The jobs at this plant provide good family-sustaining wages that are integral to the economic vitality of the region.

The owners of Homer City will invest nearly three quarters of a billion dollars in the plant to equip it with state-of-the-art pollution controls that will achieve significant emission reductions.

To its credit, Homer City elected to invest in the future and people of Indiana County, in stark contrast to many other plants that have responded to recent environmental regulations by shutting down.

I believe it is essential that Homer City not be penalized by whatever plan the Department develops on Greenhouse Gases for existing sources.

Instead, I urge the Commonwealth to adopt a strategy that allows Homer City and other coal-fired power plants like Homer City, to continue to operate and pay back its investment in clean technology and in our futures.

Rulemaking should not be a punitive process.

In the purest sense, the absolute best way to bring about pristine air quality would be to institute a full and complete ban on thermal generation of all kinds. While that would elate some, it just is not a feasible idea.

Instead, we need realistic and pragmatic approaches and that's what I urge the Department to keep at the forefront of its rulemaking deliberations.

We can and should work toward protecting and improving our environment, but I strongly caution against imposing regulations that would result in the shutting of our remaining coal-fired power generation facilities and the direct and indirect loss of thousands of jobs.

Thus, it is critical that the DEP get this regulation right and develop emission standards that make sense for the Commonwealth.

The Clean Air Act makes clear that the Commonwealth has substantial flexibility in how it regulates Green House Gases from existing sources.

To that end, I believe the Department's plan should account for the GHG reductions already achieved by sources within the Commonwealth, including reductions from recent retirements. Sources within Pennsylvania should not have to reduce more than their fair share.

The Department should also distinguish between coal-fired and natural-gas fired generating units and should not adopt a one-sized-fits-all strategy.

The Plan should include emission standards that reflect emission reductions that can be reasonably achieved plant-wide. Sources should be able to control their own compliance, and should not be subjected to a "systems wide" approach, such as an allowance based cap-and-trade program.

The program adopted by the Department should reflect the remaining useful lives of individual facilities and afford owners sufficient time to recoup their investments in these facilities. Otherwise the Department's program could discourage others from making future investment in the State.

Finally, I would suggest that the Department's plan include compliance deadlines that are reasonable and reflect the obligations already imposed upon the power sector.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share my thoughts on your efforts to develop GHG standards for existing power plants in the Commonwealth.