

The Salt Lake Tribune

Climate change: Guvs to team up

Huntsman joins Schwarzenegger, who is in Utah on Monday, in a 6-state global warming consortium

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The Salt Lake Tribune
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Gov. Jon M. Huntsman Jr. is teaming up with movie action hero and California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in his latest adventure: a mission to terminate climate change.

The Utah Republican prepared over the weekend for a Monday visit by Schwarzenegger, a fellow GOP leader whose state is credited with waging the nation's most aggressive assault on climate change.

"It's in line with the priorities I have for the state," Huntsman said of the Western Regional Climate Action Initiative. "Climate change is a real issue and one that we all need to get smart about."

The move comes in the weeks after a series of international reports that suggest people worldwide need to prepare for climate change and that reasonable solutions are available to address it. In the West, the effects are expected to be more and deeper droughts.

The partnership also comes a few days after Huntsman announced that Utah would join a registry developing standardized measuring tools for the greenhouse gases blamed for climate change, tools needed when those gases eventually face government or market-based controls.

Huntsman said he was intrigued by the idea when Schwarzenegger first described it at a National Governors Association meeting in February. Although Utah already has set a goal of improving its energy efficiency statewide 25 percent by 2015, he said the state needs to position itself for national climate change controls - and the business opportunities they will create.

Utah's new self-inventory of greenhouse gases showed the state, its businesses and citizens contribute about 70 million metric tons to the atmosphere. About half of that is absorbed, or "captured," by the state's forests, which means the state's net output is about 35 million metric tons.

"Our whole effort here is to try to reduce our carbon footprint," said Huntsman.

The governor said part of the improvements will come from energy efficiency - from government, business and citizens. Others can be realized through more use of renewable energy, for which he plans to announce new targets in the coming weeks.

Business is already committed to more progressive climate-change policies and, in some cases, hopes to benefit from them, he noted. Companies are exploring zero-emission manufacturing and carbon sequestration, a strategy that involves injecting carbon into underground repositories.

"I'm very excited about it," he said. "I think it's good for our state. It's good for our people. It's good for our economy. I think we are going to see economic development opportunities we have never imagined."

Huntsman said the six-state group - which also includes Washington, Oregon, Arizona, New Mexico and Canadian province British Columbia - will have "firepower," advancing climate-change policy faster and farther than ever and may even serve as a "guidepost" for federal policies that many see coming from

Washington, D.C., eventually.

Does that mean no more coal-fired electric plants? "I don't think anyone is crossing off coal plants," he said. "We have bounteous amounts of coal, and a lot of it is clean coal. And I think the free market has a very interesting way of dealing with these challenges."

Last week, several key observers discussed in general what they think the state's role should be. **Steven J. Christiansen, a Salt Lake City lawyer** with a focus on climate change, said companies want not only more certainty so they can plan their futures but also policies that reward businesses that develop and adopt promising technologies.

"I think we need all the help we can get in terms of diversifying our [energy] portfolios and our energy policy in Utah," **Christiansen** said. Policymakers should strive to turn Utah into a hotbed for climate technology entrepreneurs, he added.

Dave Eskelsen, a spokesman for Rocky Mountain Power in Utah, said the state needs to include affected businesses - like the energy industry - in any discussions. He noted his company already is working with three of the Western Climate Action initiative states in its service area - California, Oregon and Washington.

The trick is going to be addressing the growing needs for energy in Rocky Mountain Power states and keeping customer rates affordable - all while staying in line of any new restrictions related to climate change.

"It is absolutely essential that policies on climate change or regulation of carbon dioxide be well-informed," Eskelsen said. "That's why we're at the table. That's why we're engaged."

Huntsman said he is not sure at this point what role the Legislature might be called upon to play in implementing the multi-state climate plan. But he waved off a suggestion that a liberal "political tag" might be applied to the effort.

"I think most Americans and most Utahns are coming around to a view that we must take action," he said.

Rep. Roger Barrus, R-Centerville, a member of the governor's Blue Ribbon Advisory Council on Climate Change, said he sees lawmakers taking a more cautious approach to climate change.

"I really don't think we're going to get in there and pass climate change laws until the science is in to substantiate that what we do is the right thing," said the retired Questar Corp. executive.

"The last thing we want to do is come back the next year and say, 'Oh, we are just fooling.' "

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