

## Where Republicans Want Renewables

Nevada—home of nuclear testing and 99-cent ham and eggs—could become a hot spot for conservatives and conservationists.

CARSON CITY, Nev. --- Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval and other state officials recently sat down with a few of us environmental journalists to discuss the state's green initiatives.

“I’ve taken it upon myself to make this a priority,” he said. “Nevada historically has been a mining and gaming and tourism state, and everyone understands we need to put another leg on the stool.”

He also talked about recent meetings with Democratic California Governor Jerry Brown and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar.

It’s not the kind of thing you expect to hear from a sitting Republican.

But Sandoval, as well as Republican Lieutenant Governor Brian Krolicki, might represent a trend I suspect (or hope) exists beneath the radar -- namely, that the antagonism toward renewable energy on the national level maybe isn't as deep as it might look. Yes, Fred Upton might get attention by calling for a **repeal the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007**, a bill he sponsored, but it doesn't mean that his constituents in Michigan see the new battery factories in the state as the harbinger of one-world socialism.

Environmental politics have only recently become so polarized. Presidential candidate Tim Pawlenty objects to carbon legislation now, but he favored such policies back in 2008. Arnold Schwarzenegger helped steer California’s green policies. And don’t forget, cap and trade was an idea devised under George Bush I to curb acid rain.

So what might make the pendulum swing back?

**1. Green = Jobs.** Both Sandoval and Krolicki emphasized how **green equals employment**. Plus, Nevada doesn’t have a fossil fuel industry, which means a noticeable absence of coal and natural gas lobbyists.

Instead, the state is populated with contractors, who’ve been saddled with declining incomes and intermittent employment since 2008. While renewable power plants do employ people directly, most of the jobs come through construction: erecting solar fields, putting up wind farms, etc.

“There are [Native American] tribes in southern Nevada that see this as an opportunity for jobs and to diversify themselves,” said Sandoval.

More than 60 bills addressed energy in the last legislative session, noted Stacey Crowley, the state’s energy director, second only to education.

**2. Resources.** Most of the seventh largest state in the U.S. looks like a set from **Mad Max**: miles of hot, empty desert broken up by the occasional town. It’s attractive in a Jean-Paul

Sartre sort of way. It's also ideal for solar farms. SolarReserve just obtained a **\$737 million loan guarantee for a 110-megawatt solar thermal plant** with molten salt storage near Tonopah.

**3. Exports.** California and its **33 percent renewable portfolio standard** sits right next door. Nevada is looking at establishing three east-west transmission corridors to send power to the state. Nevada has its own RPS -- 25 percent by 2025 -- but it has more raw resources than it needs.

"They've got a very aggressive standard. We've got the supply," he said. "It is an opportunity for a marriage between Nevada and California."

**4. Flexible attitudes.** Nevada has always exhibited a somewhat skeptical view toward government. I know. I grew up there. Grocery stores used to sell handguns. Some bars haven't been closed since John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. We gave the world no-limit pai gow, drive-in marriage chapels and Area 51.

The important part, however, is that this attitude isn't fostered out of some die-hard strain of Libertarianism. Instead, it's pragmatic. Gambling became legal to help the state wiggle out from beneath the power of mining conglomerates.

Geez, people. It's not Arizona.

**5. Low-Hanging Fruit.** Nothing stimulates momentum for green industries more than early victories or losses. Luckily, some of the local experiments have gone quite well.

Reno, for instance, replaced the lights in its downtown arch ("The Biggest Little City in the World") with 2,076 **LEDs**, according to Jason Geddes, environmental services administrator for the city. It reduced power consumption for the sign by 70 percent.

The city is now switching out street lights and pedestrian crossing signals with LEDs. Reno's city hall reduced its own power consumption, from \$4.54 a square foot to \$2.54, by 45 percent with new hot water boilers and lights. OK, so ROI on the small wind turbines might take 35 years and the legislature just killed a feed-in tariff: just imagine what you can do with LEDs in slot machines.

Geothermal has been a hit, too. The 100-megawatt Galena geothermal plant outside of Reno provides 22 percent of Reno's daytime power.

**6. Size = Power.** Last year, we asked Mississippi officials how they managed to convince four rising startups to open factories in its borders, particularly when the state didn't even have a renewable portfolio standard.

Low-cost loans and fairly low labor rates turned out to be the answer. But the state also noted how it can **provide personalized service** because of its small size. A manufacturer wants to meet a high-ranking state official. One phone call and the meeting is set.

The same circumstances exist here. Sandoval touts the state's ability to offer "service after the sale," i.e., ensuring that the state will smooth out potential bureaucratic nightmares.

"As governor, I'm making phone calls to CEOs," he said. "I literally have call lists."

Google is currently lobbying the state to **let robotic cars on the road**. What do you want to bet that that measure passes?

You need to upgrade your Adobe Flash Player to watch this video.  
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**7. Housing.** The state was number one in foreclosures in 2009 and 2010. Relocation will be cheap.

**8. A Cluster of Expertise.** Because of the state's geology, it has emerged as one of the centers of geothermal power and research.

Interestingly, you're also now beginning to see the formation of lateral industries. ElectraTherm, headquartered in Reno, makes low-temperature waste heat recovery devices. The company's Green Machine absorbs heat to boil an organic refrigerant. The vapor is then exploited to turn a turbine.

Basically, it is an above-ground geothermal system, but instead of getting the heat from hot springs beneath the ground, ElectraTherm harvests heat from burning discarded wood chips or industrial equipment. A former drag racer founded the company.

"It [heat] is huge and it is completely untapped," said CEO John Fox. "A Caterpillar engine is 33 percent efficient, so two-thirds of the energy is lost."

The company has shipped units to Alaska and Australia. Senators Bingaman and Murkowski are trying to get waste heat added to the list of renewables that qualify for tax incentives, he added.

Will other states and regions try to develop industries based around exploiting heat? Absolutely. Is heat going to be as big as solar? Maybe not, but there's no denying that an island of expertise has begun to coalesce in Nevada.

Interestingly, President Obama spent Earth Day in 2011 at ElectraTherm's headquarters.

Maybe there is something to this bipartisanship thing after all.