

# Wind energy deserves full consideration

The legislative climate this year seems to be warming to changes in state law to spur development of wind energy in Nebraska.

One reason is that Sen. Chris Langemeier of Schuyler, chairman of the Natural Resources Commission, has promised to make the issue a priority in the session that begins this week.

Also actively pushing for more wind energy is Sen. Ken Haar of Lincoln, a committee member who sponsored a law last year to let small customers with wind turbines and solar panels sell excess electricity to suppliers.

Another is the formation of the Nebraska Energy Export Association. The organization, with a membership that includes the Nebraska Farm Bureau, has held informational meetings this fall to promote participation by landowners in developing wind energy.

Nebraska's potential for wind energy has been known for years. The state traditionally has been ranked sixth in wind potential, although some studies rank it higher. However the state has always lagged in actual development; it ranks only 22nd in generation of electricity by wind.

In contrast, Iowa ranks No. 2 in development of wind energy — a fact that is obvious to anyone who has traveled by interstate across Iowa and witnessed the vista of wind turbines that stretch across the horizon.

A report presented last month by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory says that if the federal government's goals of producing 20 percent of the nation's electricity by wind by 2030 is achieved, 40,000 jobs would be created in the Nebraska.

Of that total, about 4,000 would be permanent jobs that would last as long as the wind farms were in operation.

One reason why development of wind energy has been slow in Nebraska is that privately owned utilities can more easily take advantage of federal tax breaks.

In Nebraska all the utilities are publicly owned. The utilities have been effective in providing electricity at relatively low rates, but the laws under which they operate were written in an era that did not envision large-scale development of wind energy.

Langemeier and other advocates want to change state law so that private investors can more easily negotiate approval to build wind farms and change the state's tax structure so that early tax payments are not as high.

Pre-session polls of senators by The Associated Press showed that wind energy advocates will have to overcome suspicion that proposed legislative changes will be harmful to public power in the state.

The growing interest among senators for finding a legislative approach that can allay those fears and still smooth the path for wind energy development is a positive development. Wind energy is booming. Nebraska should jump in. The excuses for not participating are wearing thin.