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Energy debate lines drawn

The parties' differences on global warming are clear at their events.

By John Ingold
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State Republican and Democratic leaders put the heat in the global warming debate Thursday with juxtaposed events that showed just how far apart on energy and climate the two sides can sometimes be.

Speakers at a Republican-sponsored forum in the state Capitol referred to Gov. Bill Ritter's renewable-based "New Energy Economy" as the "No Energy Economy." Meanwhile, Ritter held a news conference just outside touting new technology from Xcel Energy that he said will lead Colorado to a "clean energy future."

While speakers at the forum said that human-caused global warming is a myth, the director of the Governor's Energy Office said the science of climate change is clear and likened such arguments to denying evolution.

"Radical environmentalists and radical liberal political figures," derided Stan Lewandowski, general manager of Intermountain Rural Electric Association and a renewable-power skeptic.

"Flat Earth Society," jeered Carrie Doyle, the executive director of Colorado Conservation Voters.

The two parties often scuffle over the merits of renewable energy versus traditional sources, but rarely is the division so stark.

At the Republicans' forum, speakers — several from right-leaning think tanks — presented evidence they said shows current temperatures are not abnormally high and said renewable energy mandates raise consumer electricity costs.

Rep. Kevin Lundberg, R-Berthoud, who was chairman of the forum, blasted news that Xcel Energy plans to close two coal-fired power plants and replace them with wind and solar developments.

"Gov. Ritter, thank you very much for shutting down the electrical plants in Colorado," Lundberg said. "Thank you so much for your leadership. But what I'm looking for is leadership in the right direction."

At the governor's news conference, which unveiled Xcel's SmartGrid technology allowing the company to better manage the power grid and consumers to better manage their power use, Xcel spokesman Tom Henley said renewable energy sources currently cost more than fossil fuels. Tom Plant, head of the Governor's Energy Office, said renewable energy is becoming more affordable.

"The price trends are going up for traditional fuels," he said, "and going down for renewables."

At the Republicans' forum, speakers talked about drilling for natural gas and mining for uranium. Rep. Cory Gardner, R-Yuma, said state leaders should explore whether to build a new nuclear power plant or oil refinery in Colorado.

At the news conference, Environment Colorado's

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Keith Hay said the state needs a different path.
"Continuing our dependence on depleting resources
is not good policy," he said.

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