

susan greene | columnist

"Greening" convention is hot air

By Susan Greene
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If Democrats pull off their PR push, the 15,000 journalists expected to hit town this summer will be fawning over efforts to "green" the Democratic National Convention.

Yes, organizers should be commended for their efforts to cut waste and offset energy consumption. After all, who's not for saving the planet?

But no amount of news releases will convince me that solutions lie in a few token efforts during a 50,000-person party in Colorado's August heat.

Especially when you consider that this isn't a convention of Amway distributors. These are the very folks responsible for fuefficiency regulations and energy policies in our country. The Democrats running Congress have failed to persuade even their own members to pass federal renewable energy standards — a plan that poll after poll shows voters strongly want.

Call me a killjoy, but it's worth noting that the projected \$120 million price tag for the four-day convention dwarfs the \$77 million Congress spends a year on solar research, the biggest project at the National Renewable Energy Lab in Golden. And the

\$50 million that taxpayers are shelling out for state and local convention security far exceeds the \$37 million Congress gives the lab to study wind energy.

Still, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other party leaders have the chutzpah to ask rank- and-file delegates scraping together money for their trips to Denver to fork over extra cash for carbon-footprint offsets.

The much-touted "Green Delegate Challenge" seeks to make up for jet fuel pollution from delegates' plane trips and emissions from their ground transportation and hotel air conditioning by eliminating the equivalent amount of carbon from emissions elsewhere.

The cost is nominal — only \$7.50 per person, thanks to a bulk rate. For that, delegates will be rewarded with prizes and recognized at the convention with a "unique wearable item," presumably in green.

"It could be a shirt, a bracelet or a lanyard that holds your credentials around your neck. We're waiting to make that announcement," said convention spokeswoman Natalie Wyeth.

No doubt, the Eastern Plains farmer planning to leave his land fallow because of extreme drought conditions caused by global warming is eagerly awaiting that news conference.

Seems to me that the onus of reversing climate change should fall less on college kids and shop stewards struggling to pay their way as delegates than on Democratic office holders who have yet to get serious about carbon taxes and other ways that would make new, cleaner technologies more competitive. Those changes must come nationally and over the long term — not just for four days during a pep rally at the Pepsi Center.

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"The real test for our elected leaders is not the party they throw in Denver in August, but the policies they put in place to set a new course for our country on global warming," said Carrie Doyle, executive director of Colorado Conservation Voters.

In defense of her party, Andrea Robinson, the convention's director of sustainability and greening, notes that Democrats have been "leading the charge" on energy reform.

"I'm not interested in doing this for tokenism. There's room to grow. That's why this election is so important," she said.

Fair enough. Onward to August, when time will tell how far Democrats' platform and nominee will go in addressing substantive energy changes.

Meantime, let's hope the gaggles of journalists have something meatier to cover than gimmicky "unique wearable items."

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