

# RM

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## VIEWPOINT

Dave Wheelihan



# No dependence on foreign oil

One issue that has gained attention recently is the idea that 25 percent of our nation's energy needs should be from renewable sources by the year 2025. A resolution to do just that was introduced in the Congress on June 7. The push for the resolution came from a group called 25 by 25, which supports the energy goal to end our dependence on foreign oil imports and promote an alternative energy industry in America to improve local economies.

This is a good idea. Production of ethanol, biodiesel and other alternative fuels can make a dent in our reliance on oil imports. Setting goals and providing incentives for the domestic production of these fuels make sense. The 25 by 25 group also recognizes that hydropower is a renewable resource, a positive step.

Electric cooperatives obviously have an interest in how this plays out since electricity production is included in the goal of 25 by 25. We think it's important to be part of the discussion and to keep several points in mind.

First, we need to remember that our dependence on foreign oil imports is largely for gasoline, heating oil and other uses for manufacturing.

According to a recent article in a Colorado newspaper, less than 2 percent of foreign oil imports go toward

the production of electricity in America.

Next, counting hydropower as a renewable without setting limits on the output of the hydro facility is the right way to go. Montana's renewable portfolio standard recognizes only new hydropower facilities of 10 megawatts or less. But the national 25 by 25 group appears to recognize that 11 megawatts of hydropower from dams built 20 years ago is as renewable as 10 megawatts from dams built today.

Finally, setting goals and providing incentives is a cost-effective way to achieve the goal of 25 percent renewables by the year 2025. For example, we supported our national association's efforts to include bonding capability for electric cooperatives and others for renewable energy in the last energy bill. Mandates fail to recognize that renewable capabilities vary by region, size of the electricity producer and availability of the renewable resource. Mandates also fail to recognize problems of integration into our transmission system, problems which utilities are already facing.

The discussion to come will be interesting, and we hope to be a part of it. To that end, we have joined the Montana chapter of 25 by 25 so that electric cooperatives will be part of shaping future renewable energy policy.

Dave Wheelihan is CEO of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association

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