

My Voice: Wind energy can power S.D.'s economic future

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The winds of change are blowing in South Dakota. Within two decades, wind energy here could power the equivalent of over 900,000 homes.

That's according to a new report from the federal Department of Energy. Researchers outlined that the American wind industry can rapidly expand over the next two decades, comprising one-fifth of the domestic electricity market by 2030. Advanced turbines will be able to reach higher and stronger winds, according to a companion report, bringing wind energy development to every state in the nation. That rise promises to generate huge economic benefits here in South Dakota and all across the country.

Unfortunately, federal policymakers are putting this future in jeopardy. Congress has failed to renew the federal Production Tax Credit, which provides a key incentive for wind energy production. This dire mistake could cause this vital industry to wither. Lawmakers need to correct course immediately — by restoring the credit to

keep the American wind energy industry humming.

The Production Tax Credit allows the wind industry to scale up and compete with traditional energy sources such as coal and gas — sources which have been heavily subsidized by the public for decades. And the initial tax reductions it's provided have paid off in spades.

Wind now generates enough energy to power the equivalent of over 18 million homes nationwide. What's more, many of the turbines that harness the power of the wind are made right here in the United States. To date, America is home to over 500 wind-related manufacturing plants across 43 states.

Nationally, the sector supports some 73,000 jobs, including nearly a thousand in South Dakota. And as wind has created more jobs, it's also become more affordable. Technological innovation has steadily driven down wind energy prices, with the per-unit price falling by over half over the last five years.

Growth of this kind can re-energize entire communities. The wind energy tax revenues for state and municipal governments can total millions of dollars per year. Local officials can — and do — put that money to good use, investing it back into crucial infrastructure like schools and roads.

This growth also brings in huge private investments. This new report finds South Dakota is projected to receive \$4.4 billion total in wind project investment by 2030. This money can spur local economies and create jobs.

Family farmers and ranchers benefit immensely from wind energy as well. Over 98 percent of American wind farms operate on private lands. Producers pay out nearly \$200 million every year in lease payments. In fact, in South Dakota alone, annual lease payments to landowners could reach \$7,700,000 by 2030, according to this "Wind Vision."

These payments make for a particularly important source of income in the drought-stricken American West, where many farmers have seen crop yields drop. Leasing land for wind turbines, which use no water, helps make up for lost farming revenue.

Affordable wind energy has also helped households across the country diversify their energy diets, insulating them from unpredictable spikes in fuel prices. It also provides more energy security for the U.S.

And, of course, wind has massive environmental and health advantages. The Department of Energy report projects that improved air quality from substituting wind energy for fossil fuels could prevent a total of 22,000 premature deaths by mid-century.

South Dakota is set to reap massive economic rewards from the wind energy renaissance. But future gains depend on smart policy-making today. Congress must renew the renewable energy Production Tax Credit — and ensure that this vital energy sector can keep growing here as it promises to nationwide.

MY VOICE

Tom Kiernan, Washington, D.C., is chief executive officer of the American Wind Energy Association. My Voice columns should be 500 to 700 words. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships.