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Blog: Power City

Expert: N.C. Green Economy Can Help 'Reinvent Fire'

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Energy guru Amory Lovins praised N.C. businesses from startups to Duke Energy for efforts to move the economy past fossil fuels in his speech opening a forum on sustainable energy Thursday night.

Lovins spoke to about 175 people at a reception at the Charlotte Convention Center. The speech kicked off the N.C. Sustainable Energy Association's two-day conference Growing North Carolina's Green Energy Economy.

The conference will feature sessions on the state's resources and potential for sustainable energy development, getting stimulus money for energy projects and financing the new "green economy" in the state.

Jobs growing

It will also feature the release of N.C. SEA's 2009 Renewable Energy and Efficiency Industry Census. [The census shows that the number of jobs in North Carolina's sustainable-energy space has nearly doubled over the last year to 10,350.](#)

Lovins is co-founder and chairman of Colorado's Rocky Mountain Institute. The energy think tank is dedicated to developing and commercializing alternatives to fossil fuels. *Time* magazine chose him this year as one of the world's 100 most influential people.

Lovins titled his keynote speech "Reinventing Fire." The goal, he said, is to drive the transition from an economy based on oil, coal and natural gas to energy efficiency and renewable energy.

"This notion of digging up stuff made from primeval swamp goo and burning it has taken us a long way, but we've got something better now," he said.

'Revolution has happened'

He pointed to statistics that show that in 2008, for the first time in more than a century, investments worldwide in renewable energy sources exceeded spending on fossil fuel sources.

"The revolution has already happened," he said. "Sorry if you missed it."

He cited efforts on small local scales, such as new renewable-energy bonds adopted in 15 states, including North Carolina just this summer.

The Property Assessment Clean Energy bonds provide financing for homeowners to install efficiency measures and renewable-energy generators for homes and businesses. The bonds are repaid over 20 years through an additional assessment on property taxes.

Corporations on board

This gets past the financing hurdle for most property owners, Lovins said, and creates stronger markets sustainable technologies.

Such policy innovations support developing businesses such as many of those represented by N.C. SEA. But Lovins said large corporations have also discovered that smart energy decisions are creating financial opportunities. He cited Wal-Mart Stores, which have set about improving its trucking fleet's efficiency by 38%. He cited Boeing, which introduced the high-efficiency 787 jet and then applied its ultra-light materials and advanced engine



Amory Lovins, chairman of the Rocky Mountain Institute, says the world economy is already shifting from fossil fuels to sustainable energy.

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technologies to the other planes in its fleet, and Ford Motor Co., which two years ago hired Boeing's CEO to run the carmaker. He noted Ford was the only U.S. car company that did not need a bailout this year.

Conference continues

He also praised Duke for its work on energy efficiency and smart-grid technology, as well as its efforts to prepare for electric vehicles. He called the company a national leader in all of those areas. And he cited Duke's investment in Bright Automotive, a commercial spinoff of technology developed by Lovins' institute to develop an ultra-light hybrid electric cargo van for commercial fleets. The van, not yet in commercial production, is expected to get better than 100 miles per gallon of gas.

The conference continues Friday.

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