

Lawmaker: Energy plan could benefit Idaho

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Idaho could make millions of dollars and create hundreds of high-paying jobs from a national plan to encourage more alternative energy sources, U.S. Rep. Jay Inslee told about 600 Idaho Democrats on Saturday night.

Inslee, D-Wash., said an energy plan he is introducing in Congress could be a boon to the Gem State's economy because of the state's abundant wind and wheat.

"Idaho has a tremendous potential for an energy revolution that will replace some of the losses they've had in timber and mining if we have the right policies," Inslee said before his keynote speech at the Idaho Democratic Party's annual Frank Church

Banquet fundraiser at Garden City's Double Tree Riverside Hotel.

The New Apollo Energy Act uses tax and financial incentives to encourage development of alternative energy sources such as wind energy and cellulosic ethanol, derived from bales of wheat straw after harvest.

He said Idaho could be the epicenter of the changes with a cellulosic ethanol plant proposed for Southeast Idaho.

Inslee, who represents the northern Seattle area, said Republicans in Congress and President George W. Bush have been unwilling to make major gains in alternative energy policy because of their reliance on support from the gas industry. With Democrats now in control of Congress, it's time to make progress on energy, he said.

"I'm very excited about what I call

the clean energy revolution here in Idaho, but we've got to have the right people in power in Washington," said Inslee, 56, formerly an attorney. "This shouldn't be a partisan issue; it's just that the [Republican] party has been in the pocket of the oil and gas industry for so long."

He said growing support for ideas like alternative energy will turn interior West states like Idaho "at least purple," and cited the Idaho Democratic Party's success in gaining six formerly Republican seats in the state Legislature last November.

Attendees paid \$75 per person to attend the banquet named for former U.S. Sen. Frank Church, a Democrat who served Idaho from 1957 to 1981. Church's widow, Bethine, attended the event, as did former Idaho Democratic Gov. Cecil Andrus.

Democrats enjoyed musical performance by Rosalie Sorrels and another

by 11-year-old comedian Trevor Hat tabaugh. But the real belly laughs came when Ada County Democratic Party Chairman Brian Cronin poked fun at comments made this session by Idaho Republicans.

Cronin recounted Republican responses to a bill by Rep. George Saylor, D-Coeur d'Alene, to increase regulation of Idaho day-care centers. The bill died over Republican concerns that young children should be cared for by their mothers.

Cronin recounted how Rep. Tom Loertscher, R-Bone, wondered aloud at the bill's hearing "How can we keep mom at home?"

"Oh, I don't know," Cronin quipped, "how about paying dad a living wage?"

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U.S. Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Wash.