

Gary Mason
Sevier County Commissioner

Interviewer-John Howe

Gary, let's start out by talking about the plant. What's proposed and what's your opinion of what should happen there?

Gary Mason

Well, the power plant that's proposed is a coal-fired generating plant. It is air cooled, therefore won't require a lot of water to maintain the plant, to operate the plant. It's a fairly small plant compared to others in the area, in the state. It's a 250-270 megawatt power plant, so it's relatively small, compared to most power plants that we're used to seeing.

Interviewer-John Howe

What is your opinion of what should happen? Are you in favor, or opposed to the building of the plant?

Gary Mason

Well, I'm in favor of the power plant being built. I have been since the beginning. Yes, there are drawbacks to any project that's proposed, and this one is not without drawbacks. But the economy, what it is today around the country-we're no exception here in the county, this would be quite a benefit financially for the area. There would be 60-80 full-time jobs once the power plant is complete and operational, and those would be family-sustaining jobs. If it's built, during the construction period there could be, literally hundreds of jobs in the two to four-year period that it takes to build the plant, and so the--jobs is one of the biggest reasons why I see some benefits. The tax base of our county is heavily dependent upon coal. Our local coal mine, the Sufco mine and Salina Canyon, between the mine itself and the trucking companies that haul that coal, they provide almost a third of the counties tax base, and so, a coal-burning plant fits in quite well for the long-term benefits of the coal mine. So, we are heavily dependent upon coal here in the area.

Interviewer-John Howe

How do most of the residents of this area feel about the proposed plant?

Gary Mason

Well, that's hard to say. You know, this has been in the process for so many years now, opinions have changed greatly from the beginning. Some people that were for it are now, would rather see the plant not built. Some people that were hesitant are now, maybe like to see it built. I'm very hesitant to put a number on that. I did once in the past, and that number changes. That's a moving target. It's hard to say. That's a tough one to answer.

Interviewer-John Howe

Describe this area and the people in it. What do they do for a living, and what kind of people are they do you think?

Gary Mason

Well, Sevier County's very, very diverse. You know, originally, going back many years, we were like most counties, heavily dependent upon agriculture and agriculture still has a very strong base here in the county. But because of our location here in Sevier County, we're very centrally located in the state and highway system, the freeways coming through here. We are very central and so, because of that, we're very diverse. There are a lot of government jobs here in the county. The Forest Service, the BLM have offices here. Government actually maybe the largest employer in our county but we have a lot of trucking. Trucking is a very big industry here, along with the coal that I've talked about. Tourism is very important here in Sevier County. Because of our location, we're very close to the National Parks. We have some very beautiful locations here that we can--that people come to visit. And so, there's a lot to offer here in Sevier County.

Interviewer-John Howe

What kind of environmental impact do you think the proposed plant might have?

Gary Mason

Well, that's a very controversial question; the impacts that the power plant could have. Just like everything that we deal with, the automobiles that we drive have changed a lot, the power plants have changed a lot over the past several years and particularly in the last two or three decades. Yes, the plant has emissions. Every power plant does have emissions, but the technology that this plant uses is the newest technology that's proven, and so we're confident that the plant can operate, and operate safely.

Interviewer-John Howe

This issue is kind of a microcosm of many energy issues in the West. What do you think should be done to bring people together on these kinds of issues?

Gary Mason

Well, bringing people together on the issue of energy is difficult. Energy is such a hot topic around the country right now. We live in the information age and there's so much information out there and sometimes it's too much information it can be confusing. Communications is the best way to try to get people together on the same page. I respect other people's opinions. We all have different views of this project and what it will mean--the impacts of it. The impacts can be studied. We've tried to be very open with the public. We've tried to have informational meetings and hearings. Some people think that we've done a fine job. Others think we've not done near enough of that.

Interviewer-John Howe

Can you talk a little bit about clean coal technology and some of the new stuff and just whether that's something that you take into consideration.

Gary Mason

No, I really, I can't. It's too technical.

Interviewer-John Howe

What do you see is the future for these kinds of issues in the West? What do you think is going to happen over the next several years?

Gary Mason

Well, we depend on energy. We depend on electricity for our needs, and I think we've all become, we love the lifestyle that we live. It's a known fact. We've got to have power somewhere. And I support wind power and solar power, water power, these types that are renewable; but they're not advancing fast enough for the needs that we have. And so, until better options are out there, coal is necessary. The energy in Utah is critical, just like it is anywhere. In Utah, 90% of our electricity comes from coal. And, so, I believe that this plant has the latest technology that's available and proven. There are other technologies for clean coal that are being developed, but as of today, this facility is using the newest technology that's proven today.

Interviewer-John Howe

We were talking about the future of these energy issues of the West. What do you think is going to happen over the next several years on this issue?

Gary Mason

Well, I think that as time passes by the renewable sources of energy, they'll continue to improve and we'll see more and more of them, but in the meantime coal, right now is the cheapest source of power that we have. Utah's power, 90% of Utah's electricity is generated by coal, and the technology that this plant is proposing is the newest technology that is proven. And, I support other types of renewable energies, and I look forward to them advancing in the future, but for right now, coal is our best option in my opinion.

Interviewer-John Howe

What would you say to the people that say that the power plant would foul their valley, and even affect the air quality of the national park?

Gary Mason

If I was responding to the people who are worried about the air being fouled in the Capitol Reef area, this plant that is being proposed, number one is extremely small, very small at 250 megawatts. When I say small as compared to the other power plants that are in the region. There are power plants that run in the 1,500-1,900 megawatt range. And so, it burns a lot less coal than they do, number one, but the big factor is, the power plant has lots, or, much newer technology. It's the newest technology available. It's been proven and reliable.