



## Saskatchewan premier takes green scheme south

BY SHELDON ALBERTS, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE NOVEMBER 19, 2009



Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall is finding more doors open than closed on Washington's Capitol Hill and at the White House as he pitches the province's carbon capture and shoritage projects as a solution to one of the U.S.'s biggest emissions problems — greenhouse gases released from aging coal-fired power plants.

**Photograph by:** Don Healy, Regina Leader-Post

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WASHINGTON — The surest way for any Canadian politician to gain access to the halls of power in Washington is to arrive here selling something the Americans are buying.

Right now, Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall is finding more doors open than closed on Capitol Hill and at the White House.

With the U.S. Senate and the Obama administration aiming to pass long-awaited climate change legislation in early 2010, Wall's latest clean-energy pitch is drawing intense interest among the handful of decision makers responsible for crafting a bill to lower America's carbon emissions.

At the White House on Thursday, Wall met with Carol Browner, President Barack Obama's climate czar, to promote Saskatchewan's carbon capture and storage projects as a solution to one of the U.S.'s biggest emissions problems — greenhouse gases released from aging coal-fired power plants.

He also landed key meetings with Senator John Kerry, who is leading Senate negotiations to produce a climate bill compromise, and South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, Kerry's chief Republican ally in the talks.

What's at stake? Wall is seeking U.S. government support — and about \$100 million U.S. in funding — for a \$270-million carbon emissions deal inked earlier this year between the governments of Saskatchewan and Montana.

The project is being touted as the world's largest international carbon capture and sequestration initiative, and would see greenhouse gases from a coal-fired electrical-generation plant in southern Saskatchewan shipped by pipeline for underground storage in Montana.

"A year and a half ago, if you said 'carbon capture' (in Washington) you got a lot of raised eyebrows," Wall said in an interview. "Increasingly, there is an understanding that this is absolutely one of the tools we need to use to reduce carbon emissions."

Kerry and Graham, who have emerged in recent months as Capitol Hill's most powerful advocates for funding carbon capture technology, share that sentiment.

In October — less than a month after Graham made a personal trek to Saskatchewan — the two senators wrote a New York Times Op-Ed article urging "new financial incentives" for developing carbon capture technology to make America "the Saudi Arabia" of clean coal.

It was precisely the message Wall has delivered during three trips to Washington over the past two years.

On each occasion, he has touted an existing carbon sequestration project in the oilfields near Weyburn, Sask., where 13 million tonnes of greenhouse gases from a coal gasification plant in North Dakota have so far been successfully stored.

"We're not making this stuff up. It's working," says Wall.

The Weyburn initiative has drawn praise from the White House, for good reason.

The U.S. produces an estimated 2 billion tons of greenhouse gas a year from coal-fired plants. The facilities generate 50 per cent of the nation's electricity but are responsible for 27 per cent of its total emissions. According to the Pew Center on Climate Change, U.S. emissions from coal plants will grow by one third by 2025 without action.

Wall envisions Saskatchewan becoming a world leader in technology with enormous potential to help the U.S. — and China — overcome environmental problems caused by an overdependence on coal.

"I think it's the Holy Grail," Wall says.

The growing U.S. interest in carbon capture and storage could see Saskatchewan rival Alberta in its influence on Washington's energy-climate debate, says Chris Sands, a Hudson Institute expert in Canada-U.S. relations.

Where Alberta wielded clout during the Bush administration — when the province's oilsands were touted as an answer to U.S. energy security concerns — energy-rich Saskatchewan has wisely crafted a climate-friendly message to match Obama's focus on green technology, Sands said.

"Saskatchewan has tried from the beginning to be about more than just oil," says Sands. "Wall is coming to Washington in an era when the concern is more about the environment. He is emphasizing clean coal and saying 'I want to help you with your problem.' "

In getting Saskatchewan on the political radar in Washington, Wall has benefited from hiring David Wilkins, the former U.S. ambassador to Canada, to make those Capitol Hill connections.

Wilkins, a former speaker of the South Carolina legislature, was instrumental in convincing Graham, North Carolina Senator Kay Hagan and a White House climate official to tour Saskatchewan's carbon capture facilities in September.

Whether by coincidence or design, Graham has since emerged as one of three Senate lawmakers — along with Kerry and Senator Joe Lieberman — who are working closely with the White House on climate legislation. Wall had already met with Lieberman during a visit to Washington last March.

"Wilkins is a lifelong legislator, someone who knows how to do deals," says Sands. "He can look at Congress and have a pretty good sense of who the key players are . . . The outreach to John Kerry is smart."

Now Wall is waiting to see if his investment of time in Washington will pay off. He hopes for a decision on funding the Saskatchewan-Montana project early next year.

"It's a process, not an event," he says. "I think we are a lot closer today."

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