

Political will problem, panel says

Blake Jones

THE GARDEN ISLAND



Photos by Dennis Fujimoto/The Garden Island

Pointing to an image of an electric car and the wind turbines that would power it, Pete Cooper of Better Place talks about his company's plans for an oil-free business model for transportation yesterday at the Kaua'i Renewable Energy Conference. Perhaps the most attention-grabbing idea during the 'Thinking Outside the Box' panel discussion, Cooper said Better Place operates like a cell phone provider, except with miles instead of minutes. The company aims to establish a network of charging stations for electric vehicles, which it is working with automakers to design. Better Place is currently testing its business model in Israel. For more information, visit www.betterplace.com.



Jennifer Goto Sabas, chief of staff for U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye, applauds the efforts of Maurice Kaya and William Parks Jr. for their commitment to the energy conference.



Randy Hee, president and CEO of the Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative, listens to remarks being presented by Jennifer Goto Sabas on U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye's views on renewable energy during the second day of the conference.



Conference attendees listen to the 'Thinking Outside the Box: Kaua'i's Adaptability in the Global Energy Equation' panel discussion during the second day of the renewable energy conference yesterday at the Kaua'i Marriott Resort and Beach Club.

KALAPAKI — The problems have been identified. The solutions are available and developing. And the urgency of a sustainable energy future has not escaped Kaua'i residents.

The political will to map out a comprehensive plan and implement policy change, however, is where Kaua'i has fallen short, said state and national leaders yesterday at the second and final day of the Kaua'i Renewable Energy Conference.

While Monday outlined the concerns and obstacles from a local perspective, yesterday's panel discussion offered an outsider's perspective on why Kaua'i hasn't accomplished more to date.

Jonathan Hurwitch, an executive at Maryland-based clean energy consultant firm Sentech Inc., gave a tough-love assessment of Kaua'i's and the state's energy problems. Hurwitch said stronger, local grassroots leadership is needed, and he specifically called for a comprehensive energy plan "with teeth."

Complaints about 49 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity? Moot when the state is fully aware of its dependence on foreign oil, according to Hurwitch.

Gripes about "ugly" wind turbines? The sugar mills, the Pacific Missile Range Facility, cell phone towers — not pretty either, he said.

Claims that renewable technology is too expensive? More expensive than what, he asked the crowd of 200, saying a heavy upfront investment in renewables outweighs the risk associated with energy prices tied to oil.

"You and your leaders have decided (that an oil-based economy) is the easiest thing to do," Hurwitch said.

"You need to come to grips with that and decide whether it's worth it."

That's not to say that county leadership, the island's utility or the state have been sitting idly by; the panel seemed to suggest a lack of synergy to propel plans forward.

The state last year adopted a goal of 70 percent clean energy by 2030, and Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative has set its sights on 50 percent renewable power generation by 2023.

The County Council in July passed a joint resolution from members Jay Furfaro and JoAnn Yukimura requesting the mayor, through the Office of Economic Development, prepare an energy sustainability plan for the county. A money bill approved by council later that month has funded the work, which is currently underway to determine a baseline energy analysis, mega-trends in energy development and a description of current and future demand, among other things.

Furfaro, council chair, said the plan could come back to the council as early as October, considering its urgency.

See Conference, A7

Conference

Continued from A1

"We need to know what can we do better and different in planning, and it starts with the economic development plan in energy," Furfaro told *The Garden Island* yesterday. "We will do our part and we have begun to do our part."

Scott Thigpen, senior associate with strategy and technology consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, which analyzed the state's energy goals for feasibility, said policy changes to raise building efficiency standards in the islands will be key.

Thigpen agreed that technology is not an obstacle to meeting the statewide goals. Kaua'i, he said, could attain 70 percent clean energy by 2030 by focusing on efficiency, biomass and wind. Photovoltaics, a more costly option, wouldn't have to enter the picture, according to

Thigpen.

Bruce Norman, an executive with GE Energy, noted the challenges faced by Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative during this transition, including balancing new investments in technology, upgrades to existing infrastructure and fiscal responsibility.

"We have to change the tires without stopping the car," Norman said of the utility's responsibility.

KIUC officials said the impact of a higher penetration of renewables to the overall capacity needs further study. If 30 percent of Kaua'i's electricity came from wind power, how would that impact reliability, and what types of storage would be required to stabilize the fluctuations, they asked.

"It's not only the end result that matters, it's how you get there," Randy Hee, KIUC president and chief executive, said.

Even without wind, wave or

solar power, proper efficiency measures can flatten Kaua'i's demand significantly, the leaders said. With a concerted effort, Kaua'i is capable of maintaining current demand through 2030.

However, Hee noted that despite increased awareness, the average KIUC residential monthly consumption has increased 20 to 30 kilowatt hours over the last few years.

Following the panel discussion, audience members were encouraged to share what they considered important next steps. Some said the renewal of the federal tax credit for solar, while others said the Public Utilities Commission should raise its net metering limit for photovoltaics. The need for sustainability education in schools was also voiced.

On rallying local leadership to action, suggestions ranged from a renewable energy task force to county ordinances that

further promote and expedite renewable energy initiatives.

"Not doing anything is the biggest liability," said Ben Sullivan, renewable energy advocate and former Apollo Kaua'i chair.

For their part, state and national legislators urged the audience to use their vote to speak their mind on energy policy.

Jennifer Goto Sabas, speaking on behalf of Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawai'i, asked Kaua'i to pick its elected officials based on who supports environmentally friendly and economically sustainable energy goals.

Sen. Gary Hooser, D-Kaua'i/Ni'ihau, asked the community for specific impediments that stand in the way of progress that he can take to the state Capitol.

"The degree and intensity of political will will have a direct correlation to the intensity of initiatives," Hooser said.

The last time I looked, chicken fighting is a crime, legally, and in

THE HAWAIIAN