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Pro-energy group draws ire of Wyoming governor

By Judith Kohler (AP)

DENVER A Colorado-based group that promotes domestic energy production and targets efforts to curtail it has prompted the wrath and withdrawal of support from the governor of energy-rich Wyoming.

On the eve of an energy confab in his state, Gov. Dave Freudenthal sent a letter Wednesday to Americans for American Energy saying that he is ending any relationship between the state of Wyoming and the group because of "highly inappropriate assertions" about his support for its campaign.

Freudenthal was responding to the group's announcement Monday of specific initiatives. The announcement said Freudenthal and other elected officials were enthusiastic about its "powerful new oil and gas campaign."

"It's a complete misrepresentation of what the governor stands for," said Cara Eastwood, Freudenthal's spokeswoman.

Eastwood said Freudenthal initially supported the group because of its focus on educating the public about domestic energy sources and production. She said the governor objected to being associated with specific initiatives, including projects in other states.

"The spirit of the comments presented is just not the way our governor does business," Eastwood said.

Greg Schnacke, who's taking over as president and chief executive of the Golden-based group, said he regretted the misunderstanding.

"We've certainly apologized to them and we're working hard to rectify that," said Schnacke, the former director of the Colorado Oil and Gas Association, a trade group.

The group will keep pushing its agenda of increasing domestic energy production and reducing reliance on foreign energy, Schnacke said.

"The effort has certainly drawn a lot of pushback from the big nationally organized environmental groups," he added.

The group's objectives include backing oil and gas development on western Colorado's Roan Plateau; "pushing back on over-regulation" of emissions from oil and gas operations; supporting

greater access to minerals on the Alaska coastal plain and outer continental shelf; and opposing "anti-production elements" in the new federal energy bill.

In a letter to Jim Sims, who started Americans for American Energy, Freudenthal wrote that he was not consulted on the initiatives and did not agree with them.

Freudenthal added that he doesn't tell other governors how to run their states.

"For your organization to tie this office with the policy initiatives in the communication from (Americans for American Energy) is offensive, at best," he added.

Freudenthal said he has reservations about his support of NextGen, also started by Sims. It is a group of state and federal officials from Western and Great Plains states interested in pushing for new coal production technology and the economic use of carbon dioxide.

Sims is the former director of communications for President Bush's National Energy Policy Task Force and is president of the Western Business Roundtable.

Freudenthal and three other governors were scheduled to meet Thursday in Cheyenne to discuss funding for research on carbon sequestration and coal gasification research programs. The other governors are Bill Ritter of Colorado, Jon Huntsman of Utah and Joe Manchin of West Virginia.

Wyoming, rich in coal and natural gas, has joined 31 other states in jointly tracking and measuring emissions of greenhouse gases, and state geologists are studying where carbon dioxide can be stored permanently underground.