

**WIREC Reporting Out  
Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Development/State and Local  
Authorities  
March 6, 2008**

**Thomas C. Dorr  
Under Secretary for Rural Development**

**Thank you, Ambassador Harnish and Al Johnson, both for that very kind introduction ... and more importantly, for your leadership and endless hours of hard work to make possible this Conference.**

**As I said during the opening session Tuesday, WIREC is the product of a very complex inter-agency and international collaboration. It has been the work of many people. We appreciate all of their efforts. We appreciate especially the participation of all of you who have traveled from afar to join us this week ... and lend your support to this cause.**

**But from the beginning, there has been a core leadership team that has pulled this event together. Al and Reno ... the two of you have been personally engaged with WIREC for the past year. Now, in a couple of hours, we will all be heading home, but before we leave I would like to take this final opportunity to thank you again for a job superbly done.**

**It is my privilege this morning to report on the discussions yesterday of two focus areas: Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Development, and State and Local Authorities.**

**These discussions involved seven plenary sessions and more than 40 moderators and speakers. First and foremost, let me thank all of our discussants for their very stimulating presentations.**

**In the time available I am not able to acknowledge each of them individually, but I encourage all WIREC participants ... and indeed the interested public throughout the world ... to visit the WIREC website in the weeks ahead to review these discussions in more detail.**

**In thinking about common themes, several issues stand out.**

**First, all of us recognize the technical potential of renewable energy here and now. All of us are encouraged by the rapid development of renewables that is now beginning in so many places around the world.**

**All of us understand the national security, economic security, and environmental parameters. I will not dwell on these issues.**

**From an Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Development perspective, however, we are reminded once again that this subject is not just about energy, important though that is. This is ultimately about people ... about peoples' challenges, opportunities, and lives as participants in the global economy.**

**Many of our discussants raised this human perspective, but perhaps none so eloquently as Sarah Adams, who is CEO of the Global Village Energy Partnership. Ms. Adams reminded us that:**

- **“Nearly a third of the world’s population, 2.4 billion people, [still] use biomass for cooking (wood, crop, and animal waste);**
- **“1.6 million people die every year from respiratory diseases linked to indoor smoke pollution from household fires;**

- **“80% of people in sub-Saharan Africa have no access to electricity, 100 years after the invention of the light bulb;**
- **“1/3 of the world’s urban population lives in slums where access to services is minimal or non-existent and where mortality equals or exceeds that in rural areas; ...**
- **“[And] developing countries face the challenge to provide sustainable cleaner energy access for themselves, whilst avoiding the destructive impact of the development routes taken by the existing industrial nations over the last 200 years.”**

**I have quoted Ms. Adams at length because she has forcefully reminded us of the human dimension ... or, if you will, of the true costs of inaction.**

**We must never forget that a guiding principle in development policy ... today as in the past ... is the urgent moral imperative of bettering the condition of the poorest of the world’s poor ... many of whom, let us also remember, are rural. This is as true of energy development as it is of any other sector.**

**This discussion is therefore not just about diversifying our energy supply, although that is important ... or about greenhouse gases, although that too is certainly important.**

**Nor is this primarily a debate among developed countries grappling with the problems of affluence and enjoying the luxury of relatively free choices. For much of the world, economic growth remains a life-or-death issue ... and time is a life-or-death variable.**

**This of course makes our task more difficult. We must ... as President Bush reminded us yesterday ... grow our way to a cleaner future.**

**We must do so in ways that respect the aspirations of the developing world. We must do so in ways that respect the diversity of national circumstances and capacities.**

**And with regard to the environmental challenge, as the President also emphasized yesterday, we must do so in ways that are effective ... which means that all major economies must participate. No free rides.**

**This is a difficult balance to strike. But after listening to the discussions yesterday, a number of positive themes emerged very clearly.**

- **There is, above all, a universal recognition that renewable energy is indeed an immense opportunity for farmers and rural communities. No one wants to sit this one out.**
- **Yes, there will be adjustments. There will be surprises. There always are. Change can be unsettling. But in the final analysis, renewable energy is highly distributed. There is regional variation, but virtually every region has a substantial renewable energy potential of one kind or another. It is highly encouraging that, to a remarkable degree, this is truly an equal opportunity game.**
- **There is also a general recognition that the food vs. fuel debate is manageable. We have heard from Brazil, Japan, and others about significant underutilized agricultural resources that can be put into production. We have heard from many discussants about increasing yields and higher conversion efficiencies. And we share**

**a confidence that second and third generation feedstocks will move biofuels beyond food crops to a much broader resource base.**

- **Many critics have a surprisingly static view of the production potential of modern agriculture. From an agricultural perspective, the question is not Food vs. Fuel. It is Food AND Fuel, and both are opportunities for agriculture. I dwell on this because I am myself a farmer. Prior to taking a job in Washington seven years ago, I had spent 30 years in northwest Iowa growing corn, soybeans, hogs, and cattle. I know what farmers today can do.**
- **Another opportunity is BioBased Products. Great attention is focused on biofuels, largely because of consumer awareness of rising fuel prices. But in the long run, the potential from non-fuel biobased products may be every bit as large. Several speakers called for increased research and development in this area as well.**
- **Forestry has great potential. Forests contribute to carbon sequestration and at the same time provide a significant, sustainable renewable energy resource. In Finland, for example,**

**70% of renewable energy is forest based. In the United States, the Woody Biomass program utilizes ... for energy ... material culled to reduce the fire hazard or removed because it is diseased. Very promising research is proceeding in several countries to enhance the forest resource. We have forest products companies in the United States, for example, that are projecting a doubling of forest productivity on the lands they manage in the next few years.**

- With regard to broader rural development issues, many presenters emphasized that renewable energy imposes a need for structural change. But I would suggest ... in keeping with the spirit of our presenters ... that this too should be viewed as an opportunity rather than as a problem because many of these changes involve reforms that are long overdue ... and that will pay dividends across all sectors of the rural economy.**
- For example, several presenters emphasized the need for micro-lending to support small-scale, off-grid generation. A modern rural credit and banking system is a necessary threshold condition for self-sustaining rural growth. To the extent that renewable**

**energy creates a demand that calls these capabilities into being, it is facilitating development across the board. We are eager to join hands to help make this happen in a timely manner.**

- **For state and local officials, the story is the same. Renewable energy will challenge jurisdictions to upgrade infrastructure and revise regulatory and tax structures to attract investment.**
- **Property rights are another key issue. Lack of clear title and insecurity of tenure are significant barriers to development in many countries. Several speakers also noted that access to public lands needed to be regularized. Once again, renewable energy can drive long-needed, pro-growth reform.**
- **Many public sector speakers emphasized intellectual capital ... research and development ... and workforce training ... skill sets transferable to rural development in many other contexts.**
- **At the same time, many cities, states, and provinces are providing incentives of their own, independently of national policy. Many**

**local governments are also leaders in purchasing green energy and biobased products.**

**This is but a fraction of the activity underway. Very clearly, renewable energy touches every aspect of the rural economy, not just agriculture and energy. The ripple effects are universal.**

**I have long argued that in the United States, renewable energy is the biggest opportunity for economic growth and wealth creation in our lifetimes. I am convinced, after our discussions yesterday, that this perception is shared around the world.**

**And I am convinced, when our successors gather again a decade from now, that they will applaud the work all of us, and our colleagues back home, are doing in this field. We are indeed building a cleaner, more secure, more abundant world. It is a privilege to work with you to bring that future into being. Thank you.**