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## New Wyoming governor: Keep fighting for coal exports

MEAD GRUVER, Associated Press Jan 11, 2019 Updated 8 hrs ago

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Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon addresses state lawmakers and others gathered for his first State of the State address in Cheyenne, Wyo.

Jacob Byk, The Wyoming Tribune Eagle via AP

CHEYENNE, Wyo. | Wyoming should continue to fight to enable more U.S. coal exports overseas, the state's new governor said in a state of the state speech Wednesday that also called for more spending restraint and better returns on state reserve funds.

Republican Mark Gordon criticized permit delays that have prevented significant new coal exports from the Pacific Northwest. He promised more state advocacy on behalf of companies that mine coal.

"Our access to these Asian markets remains restricted, tied up in permit after permit," Gordon told a joint session of the Legislature. "I believe this to be an unconstitutional restraint of trade."

The state is the biggest single source of coal for U.S. power plants. Once burned, the coal is among the leading contributors to climate change — a fact pointed out by environmentalists and others who oppose more coal exports.

But technology employed at coal-fired plants recently built in Japan and South Korea can scale back carbon emissions into the atmosphere, Gordon said.

"That is progress that should be a gut cinch for those advocating to control carbon emissions," Gordon said.

Wyoming and other states have sided in court with Millennium Bulk Terminals, which is suing over the denial of key permits to allow coal from the Powder River Basin in Wyoming and Montana to be exported through Longview, Washington. Wendy Hutchinson, a vice president of the company and former member of a Wyoming state environmental review board, attended the state of the state speech at Gordon's invitation.

Gordon praised Hutchinson's "perseverance in navigating a complicated, time-consuming and inefficient — perhaps even now adulterated — process of getting permits."

The state also has supported its coal industry by helping fund a carbon-capture research facility near Gillette, a project Gordon highlighted.

"We in Wyoming are anxious to lead the way to a brighter future, not by following political fashion, but by rolling up our sleeves, doubling down on research and innovation, and solving our world's energy problems," Gordon said.

At the same time, hard times in the coal, oil and natural gas industries have sapped state revenue. An October state economic report predicted improving revenue, but oil prices and financial markets have since fallen, Gordon pointed out.

"Steady as she goes" should be Wyoming's goal in dealing with rising and falling revenue from fossil-fuel extraction, he said.

"Our best times will come when we assure a reliable and stable fiscal future. It's hard to find a consistent path forward when one chases revenue, hopes for windfall, or reacts drastically to downturn," Gordon said.

He endorsed a bill that would allow nearly \$2 billion in state reserve funds to be invested in securities to improve returns. He also praised a proposal by his predecessor, Republican Gov. Matt Mead, to give state employees long-delayed pay raises.

In addition, Gordon called for improving mental health care for people including veterans, police and firefighters; fighting invasive species including cheatgrass; boosting career and technical training for adults and community college students; and reviewing the state's economic development programs.

Gordon was state treasurer for six years before being beating Democrat Mary Throne in the 2018 governor's race. Mead served two terms and was prevented by law from seeking a third.