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Oak Creek Recognizes Coal is Key to Wisconsin's Energy Future

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The following is a statement from Joe Lucas, Vice President for Communications with Americans for Balanced Energy Choices (ABEC). ABEC is a national organization representing over 20,000 community leaders (including nearly 1,900 Wisconsin residents) who support balanced energy and environmental policies.

The tentative agreement reached Tuesday by the city of Oak Creek to support the siting of three new coal-based electrical generating plants is a tremendous step forward for Wisconsin's energy future. Wisconsin has a growing demand for electricity; and Oak Creek's leadership has made a sound decision that will promote economic development and ensure future progress on improving air quality in their community. This move will also benefit the entire state, because Wisconsin's economy is powered, in part, by access to low-cost electricity generated using American coal.

Opponents to the new advanced coal-based facilities in Oak Creek believe, in large part, that all the state's new power plants should burn natural gas. While a variety of fuel resources will be needed to meet growing electricity demand, choices need to be based upon criteria that will ensure reliability and keep costs affordable for consumers. If opponents of coal-based generation are successful, the increased demand for natural gas as a fuel for electricity generation would most definitely have an impact on home heating and industrial users of natural gas. To suggest otherwise would be to ignore the economic realities of supply and demand. This winter's cold weather alone just drove up natural gas home-heating bills for Wisconsin families by 68 percent. Huge increases in natural gas demand would result in even higher energy bills for Wisconsin's working families, senior citizens and others.

Finally, it should be noted that the City of Oak Creek's decision to support the siting of new coal-based plants in their community will not come at the expense of the environment. These new plants, if approved by the Public Service Commission, will use the latest in available technology to ensure superior environmental performance. In fact, the current plans call for a dramatic increase in capacity with emissions at a fraction of the current level. In other words, more low-cost electricity to benefit Wisconsin consumers and the local economy ... with fewer emissions. It's evident that the leaders of Oak Creek know a win-win proposition when they see one.