

Do feds know best? Summit speakers address role of states in energy policy

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OKLAHOMA CITY – State and local agencies are the best equipped to write policies for developing state resources, energy industry experts said Tuesday at an annual summit hosted by the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs. However, another think tank said the federal government promotes energy policy that is best for the nation as a whole, and that protects consumers.

David Schnare, who previously worked on groundwater quality issues with the Environmental Protection Agency, told an audience of about 50 people at the Devon Energy Center that the only limit to energy independence is environmental regulation imposed by the EPA.

“Those who control energy control the economy and the nation,” Schnare said.

He said a federalist model of energy policy allows for more

creativity and entrepreneurialism in both environmental protection and energy supply. One issue with creating a uniform federal mandate for oil and gas drilling is that it doesn't deal with the geographical or topographical nuances across the country, said Jamie Maddy, regulatory director with Chesapeake Energy Corp.

Jim Roth, former Oklahoma Corporation Commission member and chairman of the alternative-energy practice group at Phillips Murrah, said that because Oklahoma has a long history of producing energy, it has learned its way to responsible production.

"The challenge for our country is in new areas for exploration," Roth said. "Hopefully those states can learn from the best practices ... from states that have done it already."

Gene Perry, policy analyst with the Oklahoma Policy Institute, said state governments are more responsive to local interests, but that federal agencies such as the EPA are looking at the national energy picture.

It's not surprising then that state regulators in West Virginia are responsive to the coal industry and similarly, that Oklahoma regulators are tuned into the oil and gas industry.

"Locally you are seeing (agencies) trying to follow of local companies, because that is agenda of local industries," Perry said. "That doesn't mean that it is good for our health, energy independence or national economy over the long term."