

Nevada lawmakers battle for position on renewable energy

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

In the five years since Las Vegas' summertime summits on renewable energy started, their featured subject has become one of the country's most politically divisive policy matters.

When these things started in 2008, both presidential candidates supported cap-and-trade. Nary a soul knew about Solyndra. And, "Drill, baby drill" – well, it would take Republicans another two weeks after the conference closed before they started that chant.

The energy debate's discordant evolution hasn't been all bad for Sen. Harry Reid's annual assemblies: He's increasingly been able to use the gatherings to showcase his party's platform, which has its perks in an election year. This year, he even went so far as to call the whole conference "The Power of Choice."

But while 2012 has seen renewable energy become entrenched as a wedge issue between Democrats and Republicans nationally, closer to home, Nevada Republicans are doing all they can to close that choice gap.

In between taking swipes at failed energy projects such as Solyndra (which received stimulus money) and Amonix (which was slated for stimulus tax credits) and scoffing that carbon credits are a "cap-and-tax," Nevada Republicans Sen. Dean Heller and Rep. Joe Heck have been trying to carve out their own pro-renewable position and sell it to Nevadans as just as good, if not better, for the economy.

For instance, President Obama has been saying all year that one of his chief energy goals is to get more renewable

projects – up to 10,000 megawatts worth – running on public lands.

This summer, Heller and Heck released legislation to revamp the approval process for renewable energy projects sited on public lands so the country can meet that goal and improve its pace of clearing new projects.

“By streamlining the development of renewable energy on these lands, Nevada will have the chance to lead the nation in the development of viable renewable energy sources,” Heck said at the time.

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