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Clean energy no pipe dream

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Written by Peter Krull OPINION

In Raleigh recently, North Carolinians got glimpses into two futures for our state.

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One, depicted by Gov. McCrory, is a state where offshore drilling rigs dot our coastline and fracking rigs pock our lands. Even as Gov. McCrory was expounding last week on how fossil fuel companies would be good for our state, his N.C. Mining and Energy Commission was astoundingly voting to allow fracking companies to keep secret the chemicals they pump into our ground, threatening our drinking water, rivers and lakes.

The other glimpse into our potential future was depicted by President Obama. At a company that makes energy-efficient industrial drives that save money and electricity, President Obama expounded on a future where clean energy and innovation drives our economic growth. He announced a next-generation electronics manufacturing institute at N.C. State that will train the entrepreneurs and energy innovators of tomorrow. Fittingly, the president's visit to Raleigh came just as North Carolina was ranked No. 2 in the country for solar installations.

Which future does North Carolina want?

I, for one, want a future based on innovation, entrepreneurship and clean energy — not a future that keeps us dependent on fossil fuels and threatened by the oil and chemical spills, climate change and other calamities that come with it.

Which future will North Carolina get?

That depends on whether we stand aside and let fossil fuel companies, their lobbyists and the political groups they fund continue to influence our lawmakers — or speak up and let Gov. McCrory and other lawmakers know we want something better.

This isn't about politics.

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And don't think for a minute that a clean energy future is a pipe dream for North Carolina. We already have a solid foundation on which to build.

According to Environmental Entrepreneurs, a business group I belong to, more than 10,000 clean energy and clean transportation jobs were announced in North Carolina in 2012 — more than any other state except California.

Clean energy and sustainable companies are paying off for investors, too. My firm's Green Sage Sustainability Index, which invests in clean energy, energy efficiency and sustainable companies, is proof. It has produced above average returns since its inception.

As North Carolinians, we have a choice.

We can raise our voices and let our lawmakers know we want a clean energy future that is good for us, our families and our state.

Or, we can remain destined for a future that's good only for fossil fuel companies, their lobbyists and the outside political groups they support.

I choose to move forward, not backward.

Peter Krull is founder and president of Krull & Co., a socially and environmentally responsible investment management firm based in Asheville.

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