

# Durbin, Johnson gather support

By Quinn Propst  
The Tuscola Review

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin and U.S. Rep. Tim Johnson, along with state and local officials, visited Tuscola and Mattoon Thursday, pledging bipartisan support of both Illinois cities in the fight to land the \$1 billion FutureGen project.

Durbin and Johnson are gathering support from legislators in Illinois and surrounding states that also stand to benefit from the clean-energy coal gasification power plant.

Tuscola residents learned Thursday morning at the meeting held at Ironhorse Golf Club that both sites will receive additional funding to help pay for environmental reviews and engineering costs.

The announcement of \$730,000 in funding came from Gov. Rod Blagojevich's office.

Last month both Illinois cities were named as finalists, along with two Texas sites in Odessa and near Jewett.

The next step is to complete an environmental impact study, which usually takes about three years. All four FutureGen sites have just one year to do the job.

The purpose of the \$730,000 grant is to make sure all resources are there to help the sites meet the accelerated time line, said Jack Lavin, director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and



Senator Dick Durbin is greeted by Brian Moody, executive director of Tuscola Economic Development Inc. and James Crane, Douglas County engineer, as he arrives at the Ironhorse Golf Club in Tuscola.

Vanda Bidwell/The News-Gazette

Economic Opportunity.

Tuscola will be able to meet the deadline because it is not starting from scratch.

A lot of the information needed was gathered for the initial proposal and will be expanded and improved upon

before the September deadline for the first environmental impact statement submission, said Douglas County Engineer James Crane after returning from a meeting with FutureGen officials in Pittsburgh at the beginning of

August.

FutureGen plans to test two of the three types of soft coal (bituminous, sub-bituminous, and lignite) and Lavin wants to make sure bituminous is in the mix.

Bituminous coal has a high-

er energy content than lignite coal. Burning lignite coal is like "burning dirt," said Bill Hoback, director of the Office of Coal Development.

Illinois has one eighth of the nation's supply of coal and

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Above, Tuscola Mayor Dan Kleiss addresses the crowd at the Ironhorse Golf Course in Tuscola. U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin and U.S. Rep. Tim Johnson, among other politicians, visited Tuscola to discuss FutureGen and Tuscola's chances for landing the coal gasification plant. At right, Kleiss and Senator Dick Durbin share a laugh before the meeting at the Ironhorse Golf Course in Tuscola Thursday.

**photos by  
Vanda Bidwell**



## FutureGen

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fully one quarter of U.S. bituminous coal reserves. Lignite coal is common in Texas.

"We have more energy potential in coal reserves than Saudi Arabia and any other Middle East oil-producing country," Johnson said.

States such as Kentucky, Ohio and West Virginia are also rich in bituminous coal and stand to benefit if Illinois is chosen. Durbin and Johnson hope to draw support from those states.

Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels has already agreed to back Illinois in the pursuit of FutureGen.

"The bigger the team we have supporting us, the better chance we have," Durbin told the crowd.

All officials stressed that the process is not political but driven by science to find the best possible site for the first FutureGen plant.

Durbin believes that Illinois has a leg up on Texas because the geological conditions in central Illinois are "optimal." The area also offers excellent water supply and transportation, he said.

"We have the coal reserves and the intellectual resources," Johnson said.

"This is too important globally not to make it about the science," Lavin said. "If they do that, Illinois is the natural

choice."

The Illinois coal industry has dipped in recent years because bituminous coal is high in sulfur. Production was reduced to meet the requirements of the federal Clean Air Act. But with new clean air technology the sulfur content is no longer an issue, Lavin said.

FutureGen could bring back the coal industry and revitalize southern Illinois, he said.

The potential economic impact is huge for the region and Illinois as a whole.

The construction phase of the plant is expected to generate 1,300 construction jobs and 150 permanent jobs when construction is complete.

Durbin said there will be 3,250 indirect jobs during the peak of construction and about 175 spin-off jobs in other industries.

In addition to the \$730,000 for engineering costs Illinois has offered the FutureGen Alliance \$17 million in incentives from the coal technology fund, a \$15 million sales tax exemption on materials and equipment to build the plant and a \$50 million below-market-rate loan.

FutureGen is a joint venture between the federal Department of Energy and the FutureGen Alliance. The final site selection should be announced in September next year.