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MATTOON - Mayor Dave Cline used to be a police officer, so he understands the importance of calling for backup and getting it in a hurry.

On Thursday, the City of Mattoon received some timely backup from Illinois members of Congress, including Congressman Tim Johnson and U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, on the issue of funding the FutureGen Alliance power plant project.

Each federal lawmaker from the state asked U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman to release the DOE's record of decision, which offers public confirmation that the project proposal meets environmental standards.

"While the site selection has been completed, the 30-day period for the issuance of the Record of Decision by the Department of Energy has not been met," reads the letter signed by the Illinois lawmakers. "We are interested in learning when the department intends to release this document so that this project can move forward in Illinois without additional unnecessary delays."

Cline said, "We are confident it will get worked out. Those issues are for others to work out. We've done what we can to this point.

"In Mattoon, we're looking forward to get going on FutureGen," he added.

Democrat Durbin, the assistant majority leader, and Johnson, a Republican from Champaign County, signed the letter on Thursday. Other Illinois members signing on to today's letter include Democrats Sen. Barack Obama; Reps. Bobby Rush, Jesse Jackson Jr., Dan Lipinski, Luis Gutierrez, Rahm Emanuel, Peter Roskam, Danny Davis, Melissa Bean, Jan Schakowsky, and Phil Hare; and Republican Reps. Mark Kirk, Jerry Weller, Jerry Costello, Judy Biggert, Dennis Hastert, Don Manzullo, Ray LaHood, and John Shimkus.

Hours after Tuesday's FutureGen announcement naming Mattoon as the site for the coal-burning, near-zero-emissions power plant, DOE issued a statement calling for a reassessment of costs on the FutureGen project. It declined to issue the record of decision until the monetary issues were settled with FutureGen Alliance officials.

The alliance is a consortium of utilities and coal-related firms in North America and several foreign countries, all cooperating with the DOE to fund the power plant.

Coles Together President Angela Griffin said the cost issue should not postpone the energy project at this point. Initial site preparation will start with drilling for the injection well later next year. The timeline calls for completion of the \$1.5-billion power plant by the end of 2012.

"We are very happy to see the lawmakers in Washington getting behind us on this issue," said Griffin. "We believe DOE's contention for reassessing costs is ironic because going back to the drawing will take more time and inflation will take the same effect later.

"DOE is right that it is important to address escalating costs on FutureGen, but it is also important to get this done on time," she added.

The lawmakers in their letter cited the extensive research and analysis completed so far on FutureGen.

"We are pleased that this independent council of renowned experts carefully assessed the science and strengths of this Illinois location and favorably affirmed the commitment of state and local resources that were assembled in response to clear federal expectations announced 4 years ago," the Illinois members wrote.

The FutureGen Initiative was initially announced by President George W. Bush in early 2003. In December of 2005, the DOE signed an agreement with the FutureGen Alliance, a non-profit consortium of coal producers and energy generators.

Mattoon entered the site selection process in spring 2006 and was named as one of four finalist sites in July 2006. Other finalists were Tuscola in Illinois, and Odessa and Jewett in Texas.

The DOE announced on Nov. 9 the completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement. FutureGen officials have stated that meant the record of decision was due within 30 days so the plant site could be named before the end of 2007.

DOE officials have cited extensive escalating costs in the project. An original estimate for FutureGen construction was \$850 million. Now, that estimate has doubled.