

Gillette News Record

SATURDAY, JUNE 5, 2021 * \$2.00 * GILLETTENEWSRECORD.COM

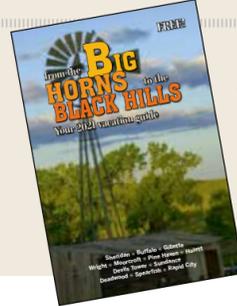


AQUAGENARIANS

New Gillette splash pad a hit as summer heat wave hits, **A8**

DRIVEN TO SERVE

3 school bus drivers retire after more than 40 years of service each, **C1**



TOURISM IS BACK!

From the Big Horns to the Black Hills, the region is primed for summer visitors, **Inside**



Courtesy Illustration via natriumpower.com

This rendering shows a potential campus for the Natrium reactor, a state-of-the-art modular nuclear facility that will be located in Wyoming at a yet-to-be-determined site of a retiring coal-fired power plant.

County, CCH talk potential for affiliation

CEO on UHealth's payroll a deal-breaker; officials assure local control will remain

By **JONATHAN GALLARDO**
NEWS RECORD WRITER

gjallardo@gillette newsrecord.net

Campbell County Health made a pitch to Campbell County Commissioners this week for a potential affiliation with UHealth.

Because of a state law, the commissioners must give their approval before CCH can move forward. They are expected to vote on the proposal later this month.

The Campbell County Health board of trustees, as well as its administrative team and representatives from Colorado-based nonprofit health care giant UHealth, answered questions from commissioners during a two-hour work session Tuesday afternoon.

"Whether we like it or not, the local health care market is changing and evolving, and we haven't had to compete as much in prior years, but it's knocking on our doors," said CCH CEO Colleen Heeter.

With the affiliation, CCH would have greater purchasing power in buying supplies, equipment and drugs, and it also would have access to the EPIC electronic medical records system.

The question about the affiliation that probably has been asked the most since it was proposed was brought up again with the commission: What is UHealth getting out of this?

Grace Taylor, vice president of operations for UHealth, said six organizations in the last five years approached UHealth about some sort of agreement, and UHealth decided they all weren't the right fit.

"We do vet those carefully and take the time to look at cultural fit, (and) does it make sense," she said. "We don't want to enter into something that's going to fail."

Taylor said UHealth is going to cover its costs, whether that's through management support, consulting or IT help. For example, if it brings in a doctor to lead a department on an interim basis while CCH searches for a replacement, UHealth would charge CCH that doctor's hourly rate, plus 15%.

"We feel that is covering our costs," Taylor said.

But the larger goal is "to build some meaningful relationships," Taylor said. "We understand the best care is delivered close to home. We would really like to support that concept and assure that 99% of the care remains in Gillette."

But for the remaining 1%, "we want to be your choice when you need us," Taylor said, adding where a patient is referred to is ultimately up to the patients and their doctors.

Dr. Attila Barabas, the CCH chief medical officer, said UHealth has many specialty care providers that, while an asset for the system, don't have many patients and are "extremely expensive" to run.

"What they're looking for is not referrals to their primary care, but to maintain the sub specialists to keep them busy," Barabas said. "They can't pay for those referrals, but they can create a really good relationship to draw those referrals to keep them busy and fund those activities."

Companies like Monument Health are

See **AFFILIATION**, Page A8

Wyoming's fission vision

Nuclear project expands state's reputation as energy capital of the nation

By **GREG JOHNSON** * NEWS RECORD MANAGING EDITOR
gjohnson@gillette newsrecord.net

A prototype nuclear facility promises to bolster Wyoming's status as the nation's leader in energy production even as the states once-dominant thermal coal mines continue a prolonged meltdown.

This week's announcement that the Cowboy State will be home to the state-of-the-art Natrium nuclear reactor demonstration project is one of the rare times that deserves the often-

used cliché "game-changer."

The multi-billion dollar nuclear power plant is the product of TerraPower, owned by Bill Gates, with partnerships with Rocky Mountain Power and the U.S. Department of Energy. It breaks the mold of traditional nuclear plants in that it's smaller, modular and designed to plug in and replace existing coal-fired power plants as they retire.

As part of Gov. Mark Gordon's "all-of-the-above" mission in energy production, the Natrium reactor is a unique opportunity for Wyoming and could revolutionize clean power generation for the United States for decades, said Rob Godby, a leading energy economist and interim dean of the University of Wyoming College of Business.

"This is a very different reactor with modern controlled technologies," he said. "If you get past energy source preference, nuclear has a lot of potential benefits, especially with the design they're going to build."

That design is unique in that it's almost a "plug-and-go" solution for the accelerating schedule of retiring coal-fired power plants around the nation, Godby said. And while the focus now is on coal generation, that will shift to natural gas after coal is out of the mix.

The Natrium's modular design is smaller than most traditional nuclear plants, which use decades-old technology and haven't changed much in a couple of generations, he said. By building at the retiring plant sites, the nuclear facilities already will have access to the power grid and transmission.

Even more important for those communities where those plants are located, the nuclear plant will



Michael Cummo Photo/Wyoming Tribune Eagle

TerraPower founder and chairman Bill Gates speaks to the crowd in a recorded video message during a press conference announcing efforts to advance a Natrium reactor demonstration project at a retiring coal plant Wednesday at the Wyoming Capitol in downtown Cheyenne. The location of the project is set to be announced later this year.

provide long-term jobs for the skilled workforces already in place, Godby said. That means negating the economic impact of closing a coal- or gas-fired plant.

"The upsides are that this is a high-tech area," he said. "That leads to some potential economic development and a technolo-

gy-based economy as part of our diversification strategy.

"A nuclear plant in this form preserves jobs locally, and those are high-paying jobs and high-skilled jobs. This will replace jobs in a way renewables can't. It also preserves local taxes. When you shut down a power plant, that has an immediate

shock to the economy."

The trickle-down impact includes a renewed focus on nuclear research and education at the University of Wyoming, along with the state's community college system. That means the potential to see communities across the state offering nuclear options along with the already specialized education for other important industries, said Phil Christopherson, CEO of Gillette-based Energy Capital Economic Development.

A specific location hasn't been determined, but it will be at one of four of Rocky Mountain Power's plants in Wyoming: the Jim Bridger plant near Rock Springs, the Dave Johnston plant near Glenrock, the Naughton plant at Kemmerer or the Wyodak plant near Gillette.

The Wyodak power plant is scheduled to retire in 2039. That retirement date is further out than the other three plants.

"This is a good project for Campbell County," Christopherson said, citing the county already becoming known as one of the nation's leading areas for carbon capture, sequestration and utilization research. A groundbreaking nuclear facility fits with the movement toward energy innovation

See **FISSION VISION**, Page A7



WEATHER, A2
HIGH 94
LOW 53

A SUMMER TRADITION: Young Roughriders team finding its stride this season, C1

INSIDE
BLOTTER, A2
CLASSIFIEDS, D1-D4
REAL ESTATE, D1

OBITUARIES, A4
OPINION, A3
SPORTS, C1-C3



0 94922 92117 8