

Consumers and taxpayers will reap a windfall

By David A. Ridenour

WASHINGTON — “The thing about money is that when you have it you don’t need it and when you need it you don’t have it,” my grandfather used to tell me. He could have said the same thing about wind power. It’s most abundant when demand for energy is lowest and least abundant when demand is highest. No amount of subsidy, no amount of federal or state regulation can change this simple fact.

Because of this, wind power can never live up to its advocates’ promises.

They would have us believe that subsidizing wind energy can improve U.S. energy security. But since wind turbines can’t be strapped to the top of your car, it isn’t clear how.

Most of America’s electrical power is produced from domestic energy sources, with coal, natural gas and hydroelectric accounting for 75 percent of our total power generation. The United States is either self-sufficient or soon will be in all of them.

Nuclear power, which provides 19 percent of our power, is the only major electric power source in which the United States isn’t self-sufficient. But with 40 percent of the world’s recoverable reserves of uranium held by longstanding allies Canada and Australia, we don’t need to be.

At the same time, wind power carries its own set of energy security problems. The next generation of wind turbines will require 6,614 pounds of copper and 95.24 pounds of rare earth minerals per megawatt capacity of generation.

The United States now imports 35 percent of its copper and is facing increased competition for these

resources from rival China, which already accounts for 40 percent of global demand.

Wind energy subsidy advocates claim that subsidies help create jobs. Subsidized wind power generation doesn’t create jobs; it simply redistributes jobs to a much smaller group of people.

Subsidized wind power only “creates” jobs by displacing workers in the more efficient conventional energy sectors and the general economy. That’s been the case in every country it’s been tried.

Spain’s renewable energy programs destroyed 2.2 jobs for every one they’ve created; the United Kingdom’s green energy programs destroyed 3.7 jobs for every one they created; and Italy could have either created 6.9 jobs in the conventional energy sectors or 4.8 jobs in the general economy for the money it spent creating each renewable job, according to Italy’s prestigious Bruno Leoni Institute.

Apparently wind energy advocates don’t know what anyone who has ever earned a paycheck knows: There’s a difference between gross and net.

Wind subsidy proponents also argue that wind energy will help significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but just how isn’t clear. Because wind power is intermittent and unpredictable, adding wind power to our power generation makes it less efficient and, consequently, more likely to produce – not reduce – emissions.

This occurs because wind offers the most power when it is in greatest supply, driving electricity prices down in the short term and prompting power companies to retire less profitable base load

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and intermediate power plants. This makes power companies even more reliant on less efficient, more costly, fossil fuel back-up generation that's needed during peak demand periods when wind turbines are often idle.

To put it another way: If wind subsidies fall, the American people will reap a windfall.

ABOUT THE WRITER

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