

Some Local Legislators' Perspective on Wind Energy

A famous saying is about the fact that we would might look at things differently if we walked in someone else's shoes.

With that perspective in mind, I communicated with several local legislators from a community where wind projects were being supported (Lewis County, NY). I asked them *why* they thought that industrial wind energy is a good thing for NY towns. Their informative, cumulative answer is below...

"We are the recipients of an intensive and seductive sales campaign that wind energy is a local, state and national benefit. For example:

- 1) Wind developers pay to have an office for full-time local employees. Those people attend meetings, and solicit the support of legislators and other administrators.
- 2) Wind developers provide us with professional grade marketing materials stating that wind energy has a variety of economic and other benefits.
- 3) Wind developers bring in paid experts who endorse the promotional materials that the developers have provided.
- 4) Wind developers see that their paid experts write letters to the editor in local papers to back developers when there are local issues of contention (e.g. with the military).
- 5) Wind developers see that a variety of state and national organizations which support the proliferation of wind energy (e.g. Environmental Advocates of NY, the Sierra Club, etc.) actively engage with legislators.
- 6) Wind developers generate political support from landowners who have a financial stake in local wind projects (i.e. the people who have turbine leases).
- 7) Wind developers carefully convert their wind project into a "property rights" issue for owners of these local properties.
- 8) Wind developers hire high-priced law firms to aggressively defend them. If our community considers wind energy regulations, there is soon the threat of a lawsuit.
- 9) The county IDA has given their stamp of approval to wind energy projects. As legislators we assumed that such an approval meant that the IDA had done an objective and comprehensive financial assessment of proposed wind projects – even though it now appears that nothing like that actually happened.
- 10) The Governor has made it clear (e.g. with the Clean Energy Standard) that wind energy development is a top political priority of his. If we want his favor we need to play ball with him.
- 11) All state agencies (PSC, NYSEERDA, DOH, etc.) also actively support the expansion of wind energy.
- 12) The federal government provides an unusually lucrative subsidy for wind energy with the Production Tax Credit. The implication is that this means that the federal government is officially endorsing wind energy as a good thing for the country.

“What support do we have on the **other** side of the equation to balance all this off? The short answer is that if any legislator wants to get a perspective that differs from the campaign presented by the wind developer, *it’s an uphill battle*. For example:

- a) The first problem we face is that we legislators are required to do our own research. No local or state agency is genuinely assisting us with this.
- b) A second problem soon becomes apparent: this is a highly complex technical matter. Almost none of us are qualified to really understand the issues involved.
- c) The third problem is that the wind energy lobby (AWEA) has seeded the Internet with a wide assortment of reports from their supporters. It’s difficult separating quality studies from biased marketing materials that look like academic studies.
- d) The fourth problem is that the wind energy lobby is expert at convoluting the facts of the situation. For example, they make a big deal about the “property rights” of landowners who stand to make a profit, yet they dismiss concerns about the “property rights” of nearby citizens whose homes will likely be devalued.
- e) The fifth problem is that sorting all this out takes a lot of time. Most legislators have a busy life otherwise, and simply do not have the time to spend on this.
- f) The sixth problem is that state agencies are not helpful at all. For example if the Dept of Health is asked about the health impacts on nearby citizens, they have no data.
- g) The seventh problem is that when scientists step forward with science-based information, we are told by wind developers that they are being paid by the fossil-fuel industry to undermine clean energy. (They provide no proof of this allegation.)
- h) The eighth problem is: when the military finally does speak up about wind energy interference, they almost always issue qualifying statements.
- i) The ninth problem is that quality lawyers who are experts regarding wind energy matters (e.g. appropriate local regulations) are extremely scarce.
- j) The tenth problem is that it’s just hard for most people (and legislators are people!) to go against the flow.

“In summary why would we fight this? If we oppose wind energy we get attacked by wind energy developers, *and* by their powerful environmental organization allies, *and* the state and all its agencies, *and* by local citizens who wind lobbyists have won over.

“If we do try to get the facts, we end up spending a **lot** of time and effort – and then can get painted as the bad guy. It brings to mind: ‘No good deed goes unpunished.’

“So the bottom line is this: there is a sophisticated, carefully orchestrated campaign to promote wind energy as a financial windfall. To resist that siren call requires unusually committed local leaders, with high intelligence and outstanding character.”

My answer to legislators is: keep your eye on the ball, know who your true allies are, and get up-to-speed on the facts by studying WiseEnergy.org. As enticing as the wind energy claims are, you may actually be dealing with a business that is a [NET liability!](#)