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IT'S MY TURN: Wind turbines not the answer

By Hugh Kemper

Have you heard Kermit the Frog on "The Muppet Show" mournfully sing "It's Not Easy Being Green?" Well, Kermit, in today's politically correct world it's easy being 'green.' Green is synonymous with clean, renewable energy and the fight to halt global warming. What's tough is when you're seen as not subscribing to the entire green agenda even when truth is on your side.

Nowhere is politically correct 'green' more prevalent and the absence of truth more apparent than in the debate over industrial wind turbines. State and federal lawmakers as well as the public appear mesmerized by the arguments of wind power advocates; namely, that industrial wind turbines are a solution to global warming and a source of cost-effective energy. The green lobby's omnipotence virtually precludes the truth from being heard -- that industrial wind turbines are neither a solution to global warming nor a cost-effective energy source.

The indisputable logic of this truth is simple -- wind turbines produce energy only when the wind blows and, as we all know, wind is variable. Because wind is variable, the average industrial wind turbine in the United States produces energy equivalent to only 27 percent of installed capacity. Because wind is variable, there is no case of wind turbines displacing more conventional and reliable sources of base load energy. Because wind is variable, we cannot avoid or delay the building of additional conventional capacity, e.g. that provided by coal and nuclear power, to meet future energy needs. And finally, because wind is variable, only marginally productive and offers virtually no capacity value, it is high cost and inefficient.

Our lawmakers are responsible for this hoax. They have created ill-conceived financial incentives (e.g. the production tax credit and accelerated depreciation) as well as an artificial market for industrial wind turbines (e.g. renewable portfolio standards) that enable developers to earn equity returns approximating 20 percent.

The tax breaks for industrial wind developers means higher taxes for ordinary taxpayers. And, as the artificial demand for wind energy grows with mandated renewal portfolio standards, you will pay twice for electricity -- once for reliable sources that are there when you need them and once for wind that would otherwise be uneconomic and uncompetitive. All of this -- a financial boondoggle for developers and higher tax and electric bills for you -- for an energy source that is about as effective in fighting global warming as a garden hose would be in dousing a 10,000-acre forest fire!

If I'm against industrial wind turbines, what am I for?

First and foremost, I'm for telling the truth. There is no silver bullet for halting global warming. The two primary causes of greenhouse gases, coal for electricity and oil/gas for transportation, are and will be part of our lives for the foreseeable future. We should be focusing on how to make them both cleaner.

Secondly, I'm for holding the executive and legislative branches of our government accountable and that begins with you. Don't simply accept what they say because it is what you want to hear. Demand that they support their statements with real world facts. In the absence of credible supporting evidence, they're simply playing you for a fool.

Finally, as a Vermonter, I'm for preserving our ridgelines (as Act 250 was designed to do) and our

natural landscapes. The integrity of our environment is not only a source of our strength and pride it is also critical to our economic wellbeing. It makes no sense to sacrifice what and who we are and what we have for no useful purpose.

The truth will eventually prevail, hopefully before it's too late. Meanwhile, Kermit, those who have been mesmerized by the wind lobby's misleading claims will undoubtedly find it's easy being green.

Hugh Kemper lives in South Londonderry.