

Opinions

The Fight Against Industrial Wind Power- It is Simply Common Sense

The threat to Vermont posed by industrial wind power is real. Our cause is just. We will prevail. After all, it is simply common sense.

March, 2004 by Hugh Kemper in Message for the Week, Chester (VT)

While I've become increasingly engaged of late in the fight against industrial wind power in Vermont, I do find time to read for pleasure and Dorset neighbor Richard Ketchum's books on the Revolutionary War are a particularly good read. And, whether it was pre-ordained or fortuitous, my encounter with Thomas Paine in Ketchum's *Winter Soldiers* at this particular juncture in this fight has been inspirational. The ranks of those who fought for our independence were small as are those of us who are fighting industrial wind power. Our independence was won against seemingly overwhelming odds. Opponents of industrial wind power in Vermont face formidable odds as well.

On January 10th 1776, at a critical juncture of the Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*. Approximately 120,000 copies were in circulation within three months and an estimated half-million soon thereafter. According to Ketchum, *Common Sense* fanned the flame of independence by giving 'tongue to the innermost thoughts of men in every colony'. During the waning days of December 1776, as Washington retreated before Cornwallis across New Jersey after the painful losses of Fort Mifflin and Fort Mifflin, Paine published *The American Crisis*-Number 1 which contained his famous 'these are the times that try men's souls'. While capturing the dour mood prevailing among the troops of the Continental Army, this pamphlet inspired all those committed to the cause of independence to stay-the-course.

It is really quite remarkable how few we are indebted to for our freedom and independence. According to Ketchum, the Continental Army never exceeded 25,000 troops or slightly more than 1% of the total population. Surprisingly approximately one-third of America's estimated two million people remained loyal to King George; another one-third were neutral and the remaining one-third, though pro-independence, were not necessarily actively engaged unless you count the state militias who did engage when the fighting arrived at their doorstep.

The small coterie of opponents of industrial wind power in Vermont (principally The Glebe Mountain Group, The Kingdom Commons Group and the Lowell Mountain Group) is committed to the cause. Their rallying cry is inspirational, i.e. 'To destroy our environment in the process of saving our environment does not make common sense'. Many who have seen and read their poster 'Vermont in Jeopardy' are horrified by the damage that huge, towering (i.e. 330'-390') wind turbines may do to our precious ridgelines, wildlife habitats, economy, property values and quality-of-life. Many of Vermont's major newspapers share these concerns and have editorialized poignantly

against industrial wind power. When objective observers learn that, in addition to these threats to Vermont, industrial wind power in Vermont will not solve global warming and acid rain and will not even replace existing energy sources, most conclude that it makes no sense.

And yet, while the common sense of these arguments has gained some converts, it is not yet the prevailing view among Vermonters and in Montpelier and the odds against success seem formidable indeed. Most Vermonters remain unengaged, particularly those for who wind power is not a 'backyard issue'. While it is sheer speculation on my part, my sense is that these Vermonters are content to romanticize about wind power as a source of clean, renewable energy and reluctant, as it were, to focus on much less recognize the disadvantages of industrial wind power. Though discouraging, this is understandable. After all, Vermonters, as a rule, are pro-environment and, as such, predisposed to favor those environmentalists who have positioned (albeit erroneously) wind power as some kind of panacea for the threat posed by global warming. The same is true of Montpelier. While a few courageous state legislators recognize the legitimacy of the aforementioned concerns and have proposed legislation to either delay and/or regulate further construction of industrial wind power until these issues can be addressed, most legislators appear content to remain environmentally 'politically correct.'

This is clearly a trying time for the souls of those fighting industrial wind power. This is clearly a time and the type of challenge that calls for the skills of a Thomas Paine, i.e. an individual or group of individuals blessed with the communication skills and sense of the public's pulse to convey and persuade an otherwise well-intentioned but misinformed and somnolent public of the impending threat posed to Vermont by industrial wind power.

This then is a call for help to those of you out there who have Thomas Paine like qualities, particularly common sense. The stakes are high. It is not too late. The battle is still undecided. With your help, our army will grow and, collectively, we and common sense can make a difference...not with rifles of course but with phone calls, letters, emails, and, importantly, at the ballot box where we can send to Montpelier legislators who have the courage to do what's right for Vermont rather than those who prefer to hide behind the cloak of 'political correctness'. The threat to Vermont posed by industrial wind power is real. Our cause is just. We will prevail. After all, it is simply common sense.