

Forests of concrete and steel

Many words could describe wind energy and green jobs. “Sustainable” is not one of them.

By Paul Driessen

Boone Pickens, Nacel Energy, Vestas Iberia and others have been issuing statements and running ads, extolling the virtues of wind as an affordable, sustainable energy resource. Renewable energy reality is slowly taking hold, however.

Spain did increase its installed wind power capacity to 10% of its total electricity, although actual energy output is 10-30% of this, or 1-3% of total electricity, because the wind is intermittent and unreliable. However, Spain spent \$3.7 billion on the program in 2007 alone, King Juan Carlos University economics professor Gabriel Calzada determined.

It created 50,000 jobs, mostly installing wind turbines, at \$73,000 in annual subsidies per job – and 10,000 of these jobs have already been terminated. The subsidies have been slashed, due to Spain’s growing economic problems, putting the remaining 40,000 jobs at risk.

Meanwhile, the cost of subsidized wind energy and carbon dioxide emission permits sent electricity prices soaring for other businesses – causing 2.2 jobs to be lost for every “green” job created, says Calzada. Spain’s unemployment rate is now 17% and rising. That’s hardly the “success” story so often cited by Congress and the Obama Administration.

Across the Channel, Britain’s biggest wind-energy projects are in trouble. Just as the UK government announced its goal of creating 400,000 eco-jobs by 2015, major green energy employer Vestas UK is ending production. All 7,000 turbines that Downing Street just committed to installing over the next decade will be manufactured – not in Britain, but in Germany, Denmark and China.

For businesses, existing global warming policies have added 21% to industrial electricity bills since 2001, and this will rise to 55% by 2020, the UK government admits. Its latest renewable energy strategy will add another 15% – meaning the total impact on British industry will likely be a prohibitive 70% cost increase over two decades. This is the result of the government’s plans to cut carbon dioxide emissions 34% below 1990 levels by 2020, and increase the share of renewables, especially wind, from 6% to 31% of Britain’s electricity.

These cost hikes could make British manufacturers uncompetitive, and send thousands more jobs overseas, the Energy Intensive Users Group reports. English steel mills could become “unable to compete globally, even at current domestic energy prices,” says British journalist Dominic Lawson; “but deliberately to make them uncompetitive is industrial vandalism – and even madness ... a futile gesture ... and immoral.”

On this side of the pond, President Obama and anti-hydrocarbon members of Congress are promoting “green” energy and jobs, via new mandates, standards, tax breaks and subsidies. However, the United States would need 180,000 1.5-megawatt wind turbines by 2020, just to generate the 600 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity that compliance with the narrowly passed Waxman-Markey global warming bill would necessitate, retired energy and nuclear engineering professor James Rust calculates.

This would require millions of acres of scenic, habitat and agricultural lands, and 126 million tons of concrete, steel, fiberglass and “rare earth” minerals for the turbines, at 700 tons per turbine; prodigious quantities of concrete, steel, copper and land for new transmission lines; and still more land, fuel and raw materials for backup gas-fired generators. America’s new national forests will apparently be made of concrete and steel.

Those miners and drillers would likely be reclassified as “green” workers, based on the intended purpose of their output. However, the raw materials will probably not be produced in the States, because so many

lands, prospects and deposits are off limits – and NIMBY litigation will further hamper resource extraction.

Air quality laws and skyrocketing energy costs (due to carbon taxes and expensive renewable energy mandates) will make wind turbine (and solar panel) manufacturing in the USA equally improbable. Thus, manufacturing could well be in China or India, and most “green” jobs could be for installers, as Spain and Britain discovered.

Posturing has already collided with reality in Texas, the nation’s wind energy capital. Austin’s GreenChoice program cannot find buyers for electricity generated entirely from wind and solar power. Its latest sales scheme has been a massive flop: after seven months, 99% of its recent electricity offering remains unsold.

Austin officials admit that “times have changed,” and the recession and falling energy prices may make it impossible for the city to meet its lofty goals. The company’s renewable electricity now costs almost three times more than standard electricity, and even eco-conscious consumers care more about the color of their money than the hue of their purported ideology.

Even worse for global warming alarmists and renewable energy advocates and rent seekers, global warming patterns have reversed during the past decade. Satellite data reveal that the planet is cooling, despite steadily rising carbon dioxide levels, and summertime low temperature records are being broken all over the United States.

“You'd better hope global warming is caused by manmade CO2 if you're investing in [renewable] sectors,” says Daniel Rice, the past decade’s best-performing US equity fund manager (BlackRock Energy and Resources Fund). But evidence for manmade catastrophic global warming is dissipating faster than carbon dioxide from an open soda bottle on a hot summer day.

The crucial fact remains: wind and solar are simply not economical without major government subsidies or monstrous carbon taxes. Moreover, cap-and-tax legislation currently being promoted in the House and Senate is “not enough to do anything” about supposed global warming disasters notes Rice.

“All it does is provide Obama a pass to Copenhagen,” where the UN will host a climate change conference in December, Rice says. And those subsidies and taxes would drive energy prices still higher, killing jobs and skyrocketing the cost of everything we eat, drive, heat, cool, grow, make and do.

Congress and the Administration are dragging their feet on nuclear power, closing off access to more resource-rich lands, and imposing layers of new regulations on oil, gas and coal energy – denying Americans these vast stores of energy and hundreds of billions in revenue that developing them would generate. Meanwhile, slick wind turbine ad campaigns promote expensive, heavily subsidized, unreliable technologies that only climate activists and company lobbyists would describe as sustainable, affordable, eco-friendly or socially responsible.

The ads and lobbyists seek more mandates, tax breaks and subsidies. Wind promoters want to quiet opponents long enough to get energy and climate legislation enacted – before Americans realize how it would drive the price of energy still higher, kill jobs, curtail living standards and liberties, and raise the cost of everything we eat, drive, heat, cool, grow, make and do.

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