

Picking on Pickens

by

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Mr. Droz is not affiliated with SPPI

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We can't go far these days without being subjected to the plaintive pleas of "former oilman" TB Pickens. Its on TV, print media, the internet — you name it.



"It's time to stop America's addiction to oil!" scream the incessant ads.

"We are importing over 70% of our oil. Wind power is the best way out of this mess." is the message in these blurbs, and on the PickensPlan.com website.

Is Mr. Pickens on to something? Has he reached new levels of altruism in paying for all this education of the public? *Unfortunately, no on both counts.*

To answer whether there is substance to this claim lets look at the facts. To begin with, only about 1.5% of the electricity produced in the US comes from oil¹. Another way to look at this would be that if 100% of our electricity came from wind power, then we would reduce our oil imports by only a trivial 1.5%.

Still another perspective is that the US exports considerably more oil than is used for producing our electricity².

But what about the other major claim on his website — that switching to natural gas to power our vehicles will save lots of oil? And what's that got to do with wind?

His sleight of hand connection is that he claims that wind power will free up more natural gas to be used for autos. Hmmm.

But in his praises for the benefits of natural gas (e.g. on his website) he goes to lengths to emphasize that one of the main attractions of natural gas is that we have significant supplies of it (e.g. "twice the reserves of petroleum" and growing). Hmmm.

The obvious question is that if we have such supplies, then why do we need to do something to free up some of it? Why can't there be a natural gas powered vehicle change over without any convoluted connection to wind power? And if he's so big on gas over oil, why isn't he proposing replacing the 1.5% of oil generated electricity, with gas instead of wind?

Ahhh, the crux of the matter.

In a recent interview, Mr. Pickens' real motivation was finally extracted: he expects to make at least 25% profit from his Texas wind power venture³! (From the limited information given out by secretive wind developers, this exceptional return seems to be rather typical.) 25%!

¹ http://www.eia.doe.gov/cneaf/electricity/epm/epm_sum.htm

² <http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/dnav/pet/hist/mcexus1A.htm>

³ <http://www.fastcompany.com/node/849689/print>

Oh, and while he is aggressively soliciting his wealthy neighbors to use their lands to erect thousands of wind turbine behemoths, he quite honestly admitted that there would be zero of these “ugly” beasts on his 68,000 acre spread. So much for personal sacrifices.

In still another interview he even acknowledged that “the nation would still need gas-fired generation to serve peaking load and to make up for wind's intermittency.”⁴ Hmm, so where's the significant fossil fuel savings then?

The fact is that wind power does NOT consequently reduce our use of fossil fuels, OR materially reduce greenhouse gas emissions. So says the National Academies of Sciences⁵, as well as numerous other independent analysts.

Oh, and TB is the founder of “Clean Energy,”⁶ a company focused on using natural gas to power vehicles. So, if we follow his second advisory, guess who stands to make BIG bucks?

Sigh. Once again, not surprisingly, it's all about the money. Our money.

So, when Mr. P warns us about the “greatest transfer of wealth,” he is really saying that he wants in on the action. The point of his advertising spree is to encourage gullible citizens to get their congressmen to support the PTC (Production Tax Credit⁷) — the boondoggle legislation that enables him (and others) to pull off a 25% killing, while only making a featherweight contribution to our energy and emissions issues. Just say, “no.”

If Mr. Pickens genuinely wants to help us out of our energy mess, he should use his money and influence to advocate that we use scientific methodology to analyze the many choices facing us. The winner(s) would be those alternatives that are: 1) scientifically sound, 2) financially viable on their own, and 3) environmentally friendly. Unfortunately wind power fails on all three counts.

Until that time, all we have here is just another pied piper profiteer.



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⁴ http://www.platts.com/Electric%20Power/highlights/2008/epp_gpr_071008.xml

⁵ http://www.nap.edu/nap-cgi/report.cgi?record_id=11935&type=pdfxsum

⁶ <http://www.cleanenergyfuels.com/>

⁷ <http://tinyurl.com/6xs5hq>