

## Blowing hot air up our shorts

Wind energy mandates make good ad copy but bad policy

Paul Driessen

T. Boone Pickens is being lionized for his efforts to legislate a transformation to “eco-friendly” wind energy.

We’re “the Saudi Arabia of wind,” he argues. We need to “overcome our addiction to foreign oil,” by harnessing wind to replace natural gas in electricity generation, and using that gas to power more cars and buses. If Congress would simply “mandate the formation” of wind corridors, provide eminent domain authority to seize rights-of-way for transmission lines, and renew the subsidies for this energy, America can make the switch in a decade, he says.

Pickens’ \$58-million media pitch makes good ad copy, especially in league with Senator Harry Reid’s absurd claim that oil and coal “make us sick.” However, his policy prescriptions would bring new energy, economic, legal and environmental problems – and a price tag of over \$1.2 trillion.

Hydrocarbon fuels built modern America, gave us the technologies and living standards we enjoy today, helped us eradicate diseases that plagued earlier generations, and boosted US life expectancy from 50 in 1900 to nearly 80 today. They still provide 85% of our total energy, and we could greatly reduce our reliance on oil imports if we would simply end the outrageous policies that keep our nation’s abundant energy resources locked up.

We have enough oil, natural gas, oil shale, coal and uranium to provide power for centuries. We have a growing consensus that we need to drill, onshore and off. But partisan intransigence and ridiculous environmental claims prevent us from utilizing these American resources.

Wind contributes more every year to our energy mix. But it still provides only 1% of our electricity – compared to 49% for coal, 22% for natural gas, 19% for nuclear and 7% for hydroelectric. Moreover, we will need 135 gigawatts of *new* electricity generation by 2020, whereas only 57 GW are planned.

We can and should harness the wind. But 22% by 2020 is far-fetched.

Wind power is expensive (even with subsidies), intermittent and unreliable. Many turbines are 400 feet tall and carry 130-foot, 7-ton, bird-slicing blades. They operate at only 20-30% of rated capacity – compared to 85% for coal, gas and nuclear plants – and provide little power during summer daytime hours, when air-conditioning demand is highest, but winds are at low ebb.

Using wind to replace all gas-fired power plants would require over 300,000 1.5-MW turbines, covering Midwestern “wind belt” agricultural and wildlife acreage equivalent to South Carolina.

Building and installing these turbines requires 5 to 10 times more steel and concrete than is needed to build far more reliable nuclear plants to generate the same amount of electricity, says Berkeley engineer Per Peterson. Add in steel and cement needed to build transmission lines from distant wind farms to urban consumers, and the costs multiply.

It also means many more quarries, mines, cement plants and steel mills to supply those materials. But radical greens oppose such facilities. So the Pickens proposal could mean importing steel and cement, instead of oil.

Since adequate wind is available only 3-8 hours a day, we would also need expensive gas-fired generating plants that mostly run at idle, kicking in whenever the wind dies down. That means still more money, cement and steel – and still higher electricity prices.

A successful speculator and corporate raider, who critics say never actually found oil, Pickens has large natural gas holdings that position him to make billions from selling gas for backup electricity generation

– especially if drilling bans remain in effect, keeping gas prices in the stratosphere. Launching the enterprise with the backing of federal mandates and subsidies minimizes his financial risk and attracts semi-free-market investors, by putting the risks for his scheme on the backs of taxpayers and right-of-way owners. His ad campaign could pay off 100:1.

Pickens says we can't drill our way out of dependence on foreign oil. But that's true only if we keep our best prospects off limits to drilling. Open ANWR and the OCS, and the situation changes dramatically.

Unfortunately, greens and Democrats refuse to budge on these options – no matter how soaring energy prices batter poor families, workers, small businesses, Meals on Wheels and the automobile, airline, tourism, chemical and manufacturing industries. They're equally opposed to oil shale, coal and nuclear.

A single 1000-MW nuclear power plant would reliably generate more electricity than 2,800 1.5-MW intermittent wind turbines on 175,000 acres. Permitting more nukes would meet increasing electricity demand for our growing population and millions of plug-in hybrid cars.

Coal too offers affordable, reliable fuel for electricity and synthetic gas and oil, with steadily diminishing emissions. With 27% of the world's total coal, America is the Saudi Arabia of this vital resource, too. America needs more coal-fired plants, to avoid the widespread brownouts that analyst Mark Mills says will be commonplace if we don't build them.

Between 1970 and 2006, coal-fired electricity generation nearly tripled – while NOX emissions remained at 1970 levels, sulfur dioxide pollution fell nearly 40% below 1970 emissions, and fine particulates declined to 90% below 1970 levels. In a few years, power plants will emit only water and carbon dioxide, the two dominant greenhouse gases of Climate Armageddon hypotheses.

Al Gore, James Hansen and various legislators claim fossil fuels are destroying the planet. But they are increasingly on the fringes, whereas countless experts point out that we have far higher priorities than speculative climate monsters; the economic costs of climate bills like Warner-Lieberman would be staggering; and the global CO2 and climate benefits of US economic suicide would be imperceptible.

32,000 scientists have signed the consensus-busting [Oregon Petition](#), saying they see “no convincing scientific evidence” that humans are causing catastrophic climate change. The American Physical Society reopened its debate, because many of its 50,000 physicist members disagree that evidence for global warming is “incontrovertible.” The [Manhattan Declaration](#) has been signed by 200 skeptics “highly trained” in climate science. And Lawrence Solomon's book [The Deniers](#) makes a compelling case against climate hysteria.

China is building two new coal-fired power plants every month, to power electricity-hungry homes and businesses. India too is charging ahead with hydrocarbon-based energy. Its new National Action Plan on Climate Change disputes manmade global warming fears and says the nation is more concerned about saving people from poverty than from climate chaos. Oil-rich Arab countries are also looking at coal.

“Political leaders,” says journalist Barun Mitra, “can no longer afford to sacrifice the poor today for the sake of the rich tomorrow.” Neither in India, nor in China, Europe, Africa or the United States.

It's increasingly obvious why Gore, Hansen and Reid are becoming more hysterical by the day. People are catching on that the hot air they're trying to blow up our shorts is no basis for economy-killing cap-and-trade rules or ecology-killing forests of unreliable wind turbines.

We need to safeguard access to the opportunities created by abundant, reliable, affordable energy – from all sources – as a fundamental right of people the world over.

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