

ROLL CALL

Bringing Wind Means Ignoring Real Results

Henry Wetstone
to Roll Call
2008

April 21 article on energy (“Warming to Legislation,” Energy & the Environment Policy Brief) failed to consider wind power as a cost-effective and readily available clean energy technology. The article’s editors are apparently unaware that wind energy, once a boutique power source, has now moved into the mainstream of U.S. electricity generation.

The United States currently boasts more than 18,000 megawatts of wind-generating capacity spanning 30 states, enough to power 5 million homes. The rate of industry growth escalated dramatically in the past few years. New installations more than doubled and wind provided 35 percent of the nation’s new electricity in 2007. With one of the best wind power resources of any nation and rapidly growing electricity demand, the U.S. is today the world’s biggest market for wind energy development.

The construction, manufacture and operation of wind power facilities is a rare bright spot in a tough economy, creating jobs and spurring growth to the tune of more than \$9 billion in investment last year. In January 2007, 28 new wind industry manufacturing plants have opened or been announced in 15 states: Texas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Wisconsin.

The dramatic recent growth could be just the beginning, according to the Department of Energy, which in March released a report documenting the feasibility of expanding wind power to provide 20 percent of the nation’s electricity needs by 2030. To achieve this growth, the U.S. will need to surmount important challenges: increasing transmission, providing stable federal policy support and continuing to build wind turbine manufacturing capability. But no technological breakthroughs will be needed.

A 20 percent expansion in wind power would reduce greenhouse pollution as much as taking 140 million cars off the road. But that is only one of many environmental benefits. Wind energy requires no water. While conventional electricity generation uses more water than any other activity, including agriculture. Twenty percent wind represents a water savings of more than 4 trillion gallons. What’s more, wind energy does not contribute to urban smog or acid rain. It releases no toxins like dioxin or mercury.

which has expired three times since 1999, leading in each case to dramatic declines (70 percent) in new wind development.

It is set to expire yet again, and Congress' inaction is already reducing investment in new wind projects, putting 76,000 jobs and \$11.5 billion in investment at risk, according to a study by Navigant Consulting. There is broad support across the political spectrum for extending the credit, and it is widely critical that Congress act quickly to find a way through the current impasse and enact a long-term extension of the PTC. That is the starting point for a cleaner-energy future.

John Wetstone is senior director for government and public affairs at the American Wind Energy Association