



## Wind farms, legal fights, fake news: Trump's America comes to Northwest Missouri

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January 10, 2017

Glenn Dyer is a 73-year-old former Marine colonel with parted white hair and a soft, slow, deliberate way of speaking. He is grandfatherly. In 2010, he retired from a position with the Department of Defense in San Diego and moved, with his wife, Leslie, onto 160 acres of land that has been farmed continuously by members of Dyer's family since 1888. The property lies in Dekalb County, about an hour and 15 minutes north of downtown Kansas City. To get there, you take I-29 North to St. Joseph, hang a right, take U.S. Route 36 east 20 miles, and wend your way north. Eventually, you arrive at a gravel road in some nether region between the towns of Amity and Stewartville. Follow the gravel road a mile, and there's Dyer on his porch, waving you in.

One Sunday morning at the Amity United Methodist Church, during the summer of 2015, a neighbor of the Dyers turned around in her pew and asked them what they thought about the wind-farm rumors.

"We had no idea what she was talking about," Dyer says. "After that, I started to ask around town a little. At that point, it just seemed like community gossip. Nobody really seemed to know much."

Though the Dyers have familial ties to Dekalb County, they're basically new there. But even lifelong residents of the area, like Johnnie Walker, struggled to puzzle out what exactly was happening with this supposed wind farm.

"We don't have much communication up here," Walker says. "There's not much internet access. A lot of people don't read the paper or pay much attention to what the county commission is doing. People keep to themselves."

Walker, a third-generation cattle farmer, didn't like the idea of wind turbines dotting the landscape of Amity and Stewartville. He'd watched as Bluegrass Ridge — the first commercial-scale wind farm in Missouri — brought 27 turbines to King City (which is 20 miles north of Stewartville, in Gentry County) in 2007. Three years later, a hundred more turbines started up at the Lost Creek Wind Farm, just south of King City, in northern Dekalb County.

"Nobody wants to live up there anymore," Walker says. "They're down to eight-man football at their high school."

Walker began driving up and down the country roads of Dekalb County, knocking on doors and asking residents what they knew about the wind-farm project and what their opinions about it were. Details were scant. Eventually, Walker arrived at the home of Bill Saunders, a fifth-generation cattle farmer with tan, leathery skin and a silver mustache shaped like a wishbone.

Saunders, it turned out, had recently attended a community meeting organized by Shatto Milk Company, whose vintage glass bottles and flavored milks have made it a popular brand throughout the Kansas City area. Shatto is one of the largest non-government employers in the area, and its dairy lies a few miles south of the Dekalb county line, in Clinton County. (The counties along the western border of Missouri are stacked tidily on top of each other; heading south to KC from the Iowa border, you go from Worth to Gentry to Dekalb to Clinton to Clay and, finally, to Jackson.)

Though much of Shatto's upscale-foodie customer base surely overlaps with clean-energy enthusiasts, Shatto is staunchly opposed to wind turbines near its dairy. Its founder, Matt Shatto, believes vibrations from nearby turbines could cause his cows to produce less milk. After learning that a wind energy company called NextEra sought to erect a meteorological tower in Clinton County, Shatto convened the meeting to mobilize opposition to it. ("Met towers," as they're known, are essentially scouting tools; they measure wind velocity to determine if an area's wind patterns will produce enough energy to make a project viable.)

Saunders relayed his experience at the Shatto meeting to Walker.

"I told Johnnie I didn't want to have to look at these things [turbines] for the rest of my life," Saunders told me. "He agreed but said he was starting to think there was nothing to be done about it. I said, 'Johnnie, as far as I know, we still live in a democracy.'"

Along with a handful of other property owners, they began to organize. A group called the Concerned Citizens for the Future of Dekalb County was formed. (It now coordinates many of its activities with its sister organization, the Concerned Citizens for the Future of Clinton County.) Dyer got involved and gradually became the de facto leader of the group.

Members began to read up on NextEra, a Florida-based renewable energy company that in 2015 reported annual revenue of approximately \$17 billion. They started a Facebook page to share national news stories about harm caused by wind farms, and began sending anti-wind farm letters to the editor of the Dekalb County *Record Herald*. Saunders reckons he's attended nearly a hundred meetings — zoning boards, school boards, county commissions, public hearings — about NextEra's wind project in the past year. The group also printed and distributed hundreds of yard signs opposing the project; you are unlikely to drive more than a mile anywhere in Dekalb County without observing signage depicting a large turbine encircled in red with a diagonal line across. "Health Hazard," one reads. "Don't Litter Our Community with Wind Turbines" goes another. Up on Route 33, a massive sign in a cornfield screams, "Don't Let a Florida Wind Company Buy Our Local Officials."

"We meet on Sunday nights in Stewartsville," Dyer says. "We believe, at this point, that we're the largest regularly meeting group in all of Dekalb County — and that's including places of worship."

Look out from Dyer's porch, though, and it's clear that the concerned citizens are losing their fight. Wind turbines rise 500 feet in the air in every direction; 97 have been erected in this part of Dekalb County over the past year. When I visited Dyer in late November, the turbines stood motionless. On December 15, they officially started spinning.

"We were ignorant," Saunders says. "It's only in the last year or so that we've been able to begin to understand what's been happening in our county. All these things were happening under our noses for years, and we had no idea."

Certain towns in Dekalb County, including the county seat of Maysville, feel ghostlike, forgotten. Storefronts sit empty, the library keeps narrow hours on the few days a week it is open, and most of the activity in the old town square emanates from a Casey's General Store.

But Dekalb County is not a place of extreme poverty (it hovers around 18 percent, about three points higher than the Missouri average); this is not a bombed-out old steel region in Pennsylvania, or a once-proud West Virginia coal-mining hub brought low. Many in the county farm, but jobs are available at the two state prisons in Cameron. Case New Holland, an agricultural manufacturing company, employs 165 at a parts-distribution center on the southeastern edge of the county. Unemployment is below 4 percent, as low as it's been since the new century began.

Still, like much of Missouri, Dekalb County (population 12,687; the locals say duh-cab, sometimes dee-cab, but never pronouncing the "l") has grown increasingly Republican over the past 20 years. In 1996, Bill Clinton barely won the presidential vote there, with 43 percent to Bob Dole's 42 percent. By 2004, Bush earned a comfortable 62 percent of the vote. Romney got 70 percent in 2012. In November, a bigly 76 percent of the Dekalb County electorate went for Donald Trump.

For most of the Concerned Citizens of Dekalb County, that most recent choice was simple. Hillary Clinton represented a continuation of President Barack Obama's clean-energy policies: more wind farms. Trump's statements, on the other hand, seemed to contain clues that he would not push wind. Though he said at a campaign stop in Iowa that he was "fine" with tax subsidies for wind energy, he also famously referred to global warming — a key rationale behind the push for renewable energy such as that generated by wind farms — as a "hoax." And Trump vigorously opposed the construction of offshore wind turbines near one of his golf resorts, along the Scottish coast. In e-mails between Trump and a Scottish minister, unearthed after Trump's election, the president-elect refers to turbines as "monstrous industrial machines" that "ruin the countryside."

Though no one expects to see Trump baling hay under a bright Missouri sun, this language, and the sentiment beneath it, squarely matches what I heard from the Concerned Citizens. The level of resentment toward these physical structures was visceral. One resident, Dave Curtis, told me he doesn't like driving through Amity anymore because it "feels eerie, like the Twilight Zone." A couple named Bill and Sherrie Sonderegger have set in their front yard a marquee, like the kind found outside churches and schools, that reads: "IF PEOPLE WITH WIND TURBINES LOOK IN THE MIRROR THEY WILL SEE THE DEVIL LAUGHING." A neighbor of the Sondereggers, who declined to be interviewed for this story, has reportedly

been having health problems related to stress over the fact that a wind turbine is visible from one of the windows in her house.

“I bet you think they look like neat, like the grand windmills of Holland,” Glenn Klippenstein, a former member of the Missouri House of Representatives who has lived in Dekalb County for 50 years, told me. “You see them as a thing of beauty as you’re passing through on your drive. Well, you don’t sleep under one. You don’t hear the noise they make. You don’t see the flashing lights.”

He went on: “The reason we all like living up here is because of the rolling hills and the trees and the ponds and the idyllic beauty of all this nature. Now we have these huge towers everywhere obstructing our views, almost like a finger in the eye. And it’s because the federal government is incentivizing these things. And so then you got companies like NextEra coming in here and ...”

Klippenstein paused for a moment. “The way NextEra did this — it was just so secretive and loathful.”

When a wind energy company decides it wants to build a wind farm in a particular area, it does not typically purchase land there. Instead, it leases land from those who already own it. If you own property in a place where the wind blows fast, a wind energy company representative might knock on your door one day and make you an offer to put up a wind turbine on your land. The company will pay you a certain amount per year for a certain lease period — 30 years, maybe, or even 50 years. In exchange, you let the company erect its equipment on an acre of land, and you further allow full access to your property to service the turbine, sometimes including a road easement.

As early as 2008, representatives from NextEra were approaching southern Dekalb County and northern Clinton County landowners with such offers. It can be difficult to verify the financial terms of these lease agreements, which vary — some properties are more valuable to a project than others, and landowners often negotiate for better deals. NextEra was unwilling to discuss the financial terms of its lease agreements, and several property owners I approached in Dekalb County declined to say what they were getting paid for the turbines on their property. I later learned that NextEra’s lease agreements contain confidentiality clauses that prevent property owners from disclosing the terms of their agreement to anybody that’s not their family, their attorney, their accountant, their financial adviser or a prospective property purchaser.

I eventually managed to obtain a NextEra lease agreement. The company in that instance offered the property owner what amounted to about \$8,000 per turbine per year. This particular offer also included a \$3,000 signing bonus, provided the landowner inked the deal within 15 days of receiving the offer.

Eight thousand dollars a year in exchange for an acre of land is a very attractive offer for a farmer in an era of low crop prices; raising corn or soybeans on that piece of land would net a fraction of that revenue. It’s an even better deal for an absentee landowner — somebody sitting on a couple hundred acres in Dekalb County who lives in Kansas City or St. Joseph or Omaha and won’t spend time in proximity to the turbine.

Of course, not everybody gets an offer from NextEra. (And some who do aren't interested; a woman named Kym Tindell, who lives on 40 acres down near the Pony Express Conservation Area, said she told a NextEra representative that "I didn't appreciate him trespassing on my property, and never to bring any of his paperwork down here, or come back down here, ever again.") In Dekalb County, many of the 97 recently erected turbines sit on land owned by just a handful of individuals. In several cases, these are the largest property owners in the county. A perception emerges that the wealthiest landowners, plus a few lucky others, are reaping private financial rewards while selling the local public down the river. The confidentiality clauses breed further confusion, suspicion and resentment.

And when the residents without NextEra contracts trace this phenomenon back to its core, they see a billion-dollar, out-of-state corporation availing itself of federal tax credits championed by the Obama administration. As Klippenstein puts it, "The executives from NextEra come in, stick us with these things that decrease the value of our land and the quality of our lives, and then fly back to their gated communities on the coasts."

Zoning decisions — or, more often, a lack of them — are what clear the way for companies like NextEra to construct wind farms in rural areas. Dekalb County does not have countywide zoning. It is one of 22 counties in Missouri with a township form of government. This means that local power largely rests not with the county commission (though there is one) but with township boards. Only three of Dekalb County's nine townships have their own zoning boards. In six of the county's townships, there is no zoning whatsoever, and any business — a gun range, a hog plant, a wind farm — is free to set up shop wherever it pleases, regardless of a neighbor's objections. Sherman Township, for example, where Glenn Dyer lives, has no zoning authority, which is what enabled NextEra to so quickly erect turbines within those borders.

The three townships that do have zoning boards are the ones that line the southern border with Clinton County. (The townships are divided up three by three, like a tic-tac-toe board.) One of those — Colfax Township — is perhaps the best illustration of the dynamics that result in groups like the Concerned Citizens feeling burned. Back in 2008, more than a half-decade before rumblings about a wind farm would reach people like Saunders and Walker and Dyer, two Colfax Township board members quietly filed a lawsuit seeking something called "rule of necessity." In essence, these two men — Kenneth Keesaman and Ronald Gross — asked a judge to allow them to vote on decisions related to bringing a wind-farm project to Colfax Township, despite their potential conflicts of interest. "Keesaman and Gross wanted to be able to vote, even though they had contracts lined up to lease turbines on their own personal property," Saunders says.

The judge ultimately ruled to remove any liabilities or penalties Keesaman or Gross might face "in spite of [a] possible bias of self-interest." (Attempts to contact Keesaman and Gross were unsuccessful.)

"And that's what allowed them to start writing zoning ordinances for the turbines," Saunders adds. "Until a year ago, we didn't even know we had a windmill ordinance in Colfax Township."

In December 2015, one month before the Colfax Township board was set to vote on approving a special-use permit for NextEra, Keesaman — a prominent landowner in Dekalb County — resigned from his post on the board. By law, when a township board member resigns mid-term, the county commission appoints an interim replacement to serve out the remainder of that term. The Concerned Citizens of Dekalb County recognized this as an opportunity to install a board member who represented their anti-wind turbine interests. They knew one of the other board members to be opposed to the project, so the addition of another vote against NextEra could kill the wind project in Colfax Township.

Saunders, Walker and others spent the next few days traveling up and down Colfax Township, gathering signatures of residents in support of two candidates; one had lived in Colfax for 18 years, the other for 20 years. They amassed 90 signatures — “Not an easy feat around here,” Walker recalls later — for each of the two men, which they then presented to the Dekalb County commissioners during a meeting.

“And it didn’t matter,” Saunders says. “They ignored us and appointed a guy whose dad has a contract with NextEra.”

The project in Colfax was approved. A Colfax resident has since filed a lawsuit against the board, alleging that, in issuing the special-use permit, it failed to abide by the requirements of Missouri law — specifically that it didn’t give sufficient legal notice in a newspaper, and that it failed to notify neighbors of the application. But the suit has not slowed NextEra’s march. Its towers in Colfax are up and running.

Over the course of a month, I left dozens of messages with NextEra representatives seeking comment on its wind farm project in Dekalb County. I spoke to multiple media liaisons at the company, who promised me they would have the appropriate person call me back. I also sent several e-mails to various media contacts at the company. Ultimately, not a single person at NextEra answered a single one of my questions.

The only person I found willing to speak on the record in support of NextEra’s presence in Dekalb County was Joe Kagay, a Dekalb County Commissioner who now hosts 10 NextEra turbines on his property. Like Dyer, Kagay lives in Sherman Township. He said he initially signed on with NextEra sometime around 2010. “But they couldn’t get the electricity out of here,” he told me.

Back then, there was no large-scale transmission line in the region that would allow NextEra to send the energy from its turbines to a major grid. In 2012, though, Kansas City Power & Light and the Omaha Public Power District announced they would partner on a 180-mile, 345 kV transmission line between Nebraska City, Nebraska, and Sibley, Missouri. (Sibley is located on the Missouri River, about 20 miles east of Liberty.) The route of the Midwest Transmission Project, as it is known, now slices through both Clinton and Dekalb counties. As of last month, it’s officially in service, pinballing energy between northwest Missouri and southeastern Nebraska.

With the Midwest Transmission Project in the pipeline, NextEra resumed ramping up the plan for its wind farm. At that point, Kagay signed a new contract, same as the old one. He said he’s

happy about wind farms in Dekalb County, both as a private landowner and as an elected representative.

“This isn’t a metro area like Kansas City,” Kagay told me. “It’s hard to get any business revenue at all out here for the county. These wind projects are a real opportunity for us.”

He noted that the Lost Creek wind farm, in the northern part of the county, had provided much-needed funding for local schools, ambulance and fire services by dramatically increasing the county’s valuation — from \$108 million, when it was being built in 2010, to \$156 million today.

“Some of the growth in those numbers is unrelated to the wind farm, but not a lot,” he said. “And we’re expecting another nice increase now that NextEra has gone online. People say these wind farms hurt property values. We’ve seen no evidence of that here.”

The Concerned Citizens reserve special scorn for Kagay. He was one of the commissioners who ignored their Colfax Township signatures regarding the replacement of Ken Keesaman. Many also suspect he only ran for county commission in order to grease the wheels for NextEra, having already signed his turbine leases back in 2010.

“Joe Kagay is my uncle,” Walker told me. “He’s a huge landowner in Dekalb County. The man was 78 years old when he ran for political office. How many old men do you know that run for office at that age? He’s now over 80 years old. Since he took office, he has written in the newspaper in support of NextEra and promoted NextEra, all while holding a contract that earns him money from NextEra. It’s a clear conflict of interest.”

Kagay acknowledged there have been conflict-of-interest grumblings but told me that the vote over Keesaman’s replacement was not about NextEra — it was about replacing a township board member, he said, and thus there was no conflict of interest. He added that he had abstained on a vote regarding a road-use agreement between NextEra and the county.

When I asked him how much money he has made from the NextEra turbines on his property, he said he didn’t think it would be ethical to tell me.

Everything that has happened in Dekalb County almost happened in Clinton County, its neighbor to the south. NextEra’s original plan was to build its farm along both sides of the county line, with about 60 percent of the turbines in Clinton County and 40 percent in Dekalb. But today you will find no turbines piercing the sky anywhere in Clinton County.

It is paying a price for that now, by having to defend a lawsuit against NextEra.

Plattsburg, the seat of Clinton County, is about a 45-minute drive from downtown Kansas City, and it exists as both a small town surrounded by ag-centric activity, and a bedroom community for people who work in Kansas City. For decades, the area was reliably Democratic, populated as it was by workers at the General Motors plant in Fairfax or the Ford plant in Claycomo, who were predominantly union members. Many of those workers still live in Clinton County today, Missouri Rep. Jim Neely told me. But most don’t vote blue anymore: in November, in addition to handing Trump 69 percent of the vote, Clinton County Republicans made big gains in local government. In 2006, Democrats held 11 of 12 seats in the Clinton County Courthouse; after

last November, it's now an even split. The sheriff, the coroner, the assessor and two of three county commissioners are also now Republicans. As in Dekalb County, unemployment — 3.5 percent — is as low as it has been at any time since 2001.

“There used to be, perhaps, a Reagan Democrat, Harry Truman–style mentality up here that translated to Democratic votes,” Neely, a Republican, said, with noticeable reluctance. “Work hard, be self-sufficient, make your own decisions. I think the problem for Democrats is, they have gotten away from this basic feeling of empowering people. Instead they want to make more rules. The federal government has gotten too involved in people’s lives, and the resentment of that has sprinkled down into these county governments.”

This is the cue for Democrats to roll their eyes and say, *What is overturning Roe v. Wade if not an attempt by Republicans to get the federal government too involved in a woman’s life? Would you rather have a federal climate-change policy or a planet inhabitable by your children?* But statements such as Neely’s, despite sounding canned, nevertheless continue to resonate — particularly when the audience at whom they’re directed can see evidence of those words in their daily lives.

In this regard, Republicans in Clinton and Dekalb Counties could not have asked for a better issue than wind turbines. Residents can physically see, every day, how their lives have changed, and often not for the better, as a result of the federal government and its clean-energy tax incentives. Toss into the mix an aloof corporation like NextEra — liberal coastal elites — and you start to see how seven out of 10 people in Dekalb and Clinton Counties cast their votes for anybody with an R after their name.

Clinton County had granted NextEra a special-use permit to develop a wind farm in 2010. But while the company waited for the Midwest Transmission Project to be built, the permit expired. So, in 2015, NextEra had to reapply for the permit. By then, the Concerned Citizens of Clinton County had found one another and mobilized in opposition. And they had a big gun on their side: Shatto Milk Company, the county’s most prominent business.

Matt Shatto, the company’s founder, declined to comment for this story, but in September 2015 he appeared before Clinton County’s Planning and Zoning Board to speak against NextEra’s plans. (Unlike Dekalb, Clinton is zoned countywide.) [According to the Clinton County Leader](#), Shatto’s presentation to the commission “focused on the alleged adverse effects that come with wind farms, ranging from the physical impact on the human body to the financial pitfalls of those located near farms.” He then played a video, which the newspaper said featured “Wisconsin residents who ostensibly suffered medical issues after living near a similar project.”

Shatto also said, according to the newspaper, that his company was planning two new business expansions, but that if the NextEra project came to fruition, it “could hamper both the company’s current and future investments in Clinton County.” He asked the board for a one-year moratorium on approving NextEra’s permit, during which time the county could study the issues related to wind farms.

In response, a representative from Next–Era present at the meeting trotted out data of his own: a NextEra-funded survey, which found that 61 percent of Clinton County residents supported



the NextEra project. “We believe it can peacefully coexist within the community,” the NextEra rep told the board.

What ensued was nearly a year of contentious zoning meetings, during which the board heard citizen comments and expert testimony from both sides of the issue. In September 2016, the zoning board voted to recommend banning construction of certain wind turbines in the county, based on concerns about litter, glint, flashing lights, stray voltage and general aesthetics. The county commission then adopted the recommendation, effectively prohibiting wind turbines within county limits.

Not long after the decision, NextEra served the county commission and zoning board with a lawsuit alleging, among other things, that they had “exhibited bias and prejudice against wind energy projects and plaintiffs’ efforts to develop a wind energy project, and colluded with individuals that oppose wind energy projects.”

Wade Wilken, the presiding county commissioner in Clinton, said he could not comment on ongoing litigation. NextEra’s attorney in the suit, Seth Wright, with Polsinelli, did not respond to several requests for comment.

Over time, I came to view many of the Concerned Citizens’ stances not as knee-jerk belligerence but rather as logical responses to an intrusion into their world. A thornier and more troubling issue is whether the world they’re seeing is real.

Some of their perceptions were not necessarily untrue but lacked context. For example, it is true, as Walker stated, that, in King City, where a wind farm has been operating for the past six years, the high school is down to eight-man football, and that the school district is smaller than it used to be. But so is the school district in Stewartsville, where there was not yet a wind farm when the statistics were gathered. So are rural high schools nationwide. And, actually, the overall population in King City has not declined. It has stayed steady, even risen a little.

Others were based on instinct. When everybody you see hates wind turbines as much as you do, it is reasonable to conclude that their existence will cause property values to go down in, say, Colfax Township. But nationally there is little evidence that areas with wind farms suffer decreased property values. And while it is possible that Shatto’s theory about turbines thwarting cows’ ability to produce milk has merit — a lawsuit playing out in France addresses the same contention — it’s hardly settled science.

After listening to a few Concerned Citizens speak about “clean coal” one afternoon, I asked where they were getting their information. I was directed to the Concerned Citizens’ Facebook page, where members regularly post anti-wind articles they’ve found on the internet. I was also forwarded some e-mail newsletters from the Alliance for Wise Energy Decisions. “If you’re interested in this issue, those are great places to start,” one group member told me.

Many of the articles on the Facebook page came from Breitbart or stopthesethings.com, a website with the tagline “We’re not here to debate wind energy, we’re here to destroy it.” It refers to itself as being run by a “kitchen-table group of citizens concerned about what is happening across rural and regional Australia, by the harm being done by the wind industry, in partnership with governments.”

The AWED newsletter, it turns out, is the product of a man named John Droz, who has held himself out as an expert on sea levels but has never published a peer-reviewed article. (He has dismissed the peer-review process as “inconsequential at best and misleading at worst,” according to a presentation he gave that was later obtained by WRAL, a news station in North Carolina.) Droz is a former fellow at the American Tradition Institute, a conservative think tank funded by the Montana businessman Doug Lair’s family foundation. The Lair family fortune comes from its petroleum business, which it sold in 1989 to William Koch, brother of Charles and David Koch.

In his newsletter, Droz regularly links to articles published by Koch-funded groups such as the Cato Institute and the Institute for Energy Research. One link took me to a site staffed by advocates of “free-market environmentalism,” who posit that eliminating all environmental regulations is the only true way to preserve the planet.

Many of the Concerned Citizens — old men, mostly — lack the sophistication to recognize these links as a swamp of online propaganda. This is not their fault. They have come to believe that they are finally getting, through these Facebook and e-mail links, the straight dope that the mainstream media have been suppressing. And surprise: It just so happens to align with how they already feel about wind farms.

When I tried to explain to Dyer that cynical corporate interests, including the oil and gas industry, were demonstrably the source of some of the anti-wind stories he had sent me, I realized quickly how much of an uphill climb it would be.

“I’ve been exposed to a lot of information over the last year that indicates that the calculations done on global warming that pointed to how bad this [global warming] was were based on error,” Dyer told me when we spoke again earlier this month. “And the numbers we’ve all been shown about climate change are actually false.”

He went on to cite an article he had recently read about how Antarctica is actually colder than it was 20 years ago, and that, contrary to news reports, there is more ice there now. I couldn’t find the article he was referring to, but I did find a recent report from NASA stating that recent satellite images show that sea ice in both the Arctic and Antarctica are running at record-low levels.

Dyer ventured onto the internet looking for evidence that might confirm his suspicion that wind farms weren’t all they were cracked up to be. In less than a year, he had returned a radicalized climate-change denier. His distrust of windmills and the alluring pull of an internet willing to reflect his biases and buttress them with false data from crackpots and cynical interests had proved irresistible.

Dyer, and many of the Concerned Citizens I met, are intelligent, kind, well-intentioned people. If they could be manipulated this way by the post-truth internet, it was chilling to imagine what beliefs might be taking root in other isolated, aging pockets of rural America.

In early December, I attended a meeting of the Concerned Citizens of Dekalb County. They convene most Sundays in a volunteer fire station off the frontage road of Highway 36, in Stewartsville. Dyer presided over the meeting, which was surprisingly, endearingly formal. After opening with the Pledge of Allegiance, reading the previous meeting’s minutes,

approving the agenda and listening to the treasurer's report (there was about \$25,000 in reserves for legal fees; the group has raised north of \$100,000 since forming), various members addressed the group to give updates on what was happening in their part of Dekalb County, vis-à-vis wind farms.

There was a discussion about migratory birds avoiding the Pony Express Conservation Area due to the recently erected turbines. There was an update on the Clinton County lawsuit; the venue was perhaps being changed to a different county. A man named Bob Hunter announced that he would be running for the Colfax Township board in the next election. Cheers erupted.

Few of those in attendance knew much about local government until recently. "I bet you if you asked most of these people which township they lived in a year ago, they wouldn't have been able to tell you," Saunders told me later.

But their shared distrust of NextEra, and their desire to preserve what they considered the fundamental ideals of their county, had united them. All along, they had assumed that their local leaders were acting in the community's best interest, only to discover that they had instead acted in their own self-interest. It was time to take their county back, starting with local, grassroots action. And this kind of organizing meant getting to know your neighbors, forging new friendships, winning over hearts and minds.

A list was passed around seeking addresses; a Christmas card was going out. There was talk of a holiday potluck at the meeting set for December 18. "Last time, we had about 100 people come out for it," Dyer said. "I think it'd be nice to have a Christmas celebration. Should we put it to a vote? All in favor?"

Hands across the room shot up.

"Any opposed?"

None opposed. The motion passed.