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Illusion of progress

After the Obama administration lost more than a half-billion dollars in the president's quid pro quo with solar-energy company Solyndra, the best defense the White House and its lackeys in the liberal media could muster was: It's the only Energy Department loan guarantee from the "stimulus" that has failed. (Ominously, their retort often was qualified with "so far.")

And thus the success of political patronage is redefined not as producing many new megawatts of renewable energy, reducing America's dependence on foreign oil, and creating hundreds of career jobs, but as our pandering president not being conned by solar charlatans.

But the \$535 million taxpayers lost on Solyndra is not the first time their good money has chased bad. Since the 1970s when the Carter administration began subsidizing wind and solar projects in earnest, many tens of billions have been thrown at research, development and infrastructure. In 2010 alone, subsidies totaled almost \$4 billion, and the feds plan to allocate billions annually for solar and wind grants, loan guarantees, and personal and corporate tax credits, over the next 10 years and beyond. Despite these enormous investments, turbines and solar panels today combine to produce barely 3 percent of the nation's electricity, according to the Obama administration's own data. Largest totals may have fluctuated over the years, but the chronic underperformance of wind and solar generation has not.

In 1997, Robert Bradley Jr., a Cato Institute scholar and CEO of the Institute for Energy Research, wrote a policy analysis titled "Renewable Energy: Not Cheap, Not 'Green,'" in which he observed, "Wind power has proved itself to be a perpetual 'infant industry,' with its competitive viability always somewhere on the horizon." Fourteen years later, that truth remains immutable, and is likely to remain that way no matter how many corrupt deals President Obama strikes with his campaign donors.