



George Harvey: The Source of Wind Power's Vehement Opposition

George Harvey

May 31, 2017

The Vermont Public Service Board has sent recommendations to the Legislature for new sound standards for utility-scale wind projects. Critics say the standards are so strict that they effectively kill development of wind power in the state. This has come as a surprise to a number of people, who have regarded Vermont as very progressive in pursuing clean energy. Those more familiar with what has been going among the Green Mountains have found it more predictable.

People who hate wind power in Vermont really hate wind power. That is a statement I will ask you to remember.

As I see it, there are two kinds of organizations that are actively anti-renewable in this country. There are those that are tied to right-wing politics, and possibly financed with money from fossil fuels. They are fairly predictable, in their unrelenting and outrageous way, in pushing their agenda. They are represented in Vermont by the Ethan Allen Institute, one of the many state organizations associated with the State Policy Network, whose leading members include the American Legislative Exchange Council, Americans for Prosperity Foundation, the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation.

Nevertheless, to my way of thinking, it is the "grassroots" organizations that are more interesting. We may only speculate on how they are funded. Some possibly are not funded at all. We certainly can observe that they are passionate, disciplined and energetic in achieving their goals. Their methods can even include actions that can be described as intentionally intimidating.

In the work I do for my blog, geoharvey.com, I spend about four hours every day just reviewing news relating to energy and climate change. One of the things I have observed is that every technology that has some hope of replacing fossil fuels has some "grassroots" organization that arises at the state level in opposition to it. Wind power, which those in the fossil fuels industries may see as the biggest threat, seems to have the greatest opposition. Certainly, utility-scale solar power also has opposition, as do, to a lesser extent, hydropower and biomass. Even rooftop solar has grassroots opposition, based on the false belief that only rich people can afford it, and it gives them a way to save money while costing the rest of us more money for our electricity.

The intensity and savagery of the opposition to renewables in Vermont can be seen by two incidents that took place here. In one, David Blittersdorf, who has developed wind and solar power in Vermont, got an alert from a motion sensor at a cabin he owned. A camera got a fuzzy

picture of a woman breaking into the property, through a gate. Later, the police reported that a deer's head had been left at the gate. This was taken to be an obvious threat against Blittersdorf.

Another example is an event in August 2015 in the town of Pownal. The local fire department had wanted to put in a 150-kW solar array to provide power for a pumping station. The array was to go up on compromised land, a five-acre plot with an abandoned factory building and railroad tracks on it. A group of about 30 people stormed into a meeting where a town committee was discussing the array, loudly demanding, among other things, that committee members give them a year's email traffic and financial records.

The thing that precipitated the Pownal attack on solar power was a rumor that seems to have been actively pushed to frighten people into political action. The rumor was that rain would leach poisonous heavy metals from the solar panels into the soil, contaminating ground water. Organizing the demonstration was done, I have been told, by people in one of the anti-wind groups, using the same tactics they use against wind power.

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That demonstration was severely abusive of the local committee, to the point that not only was the array successfully blocked, but four of the five members resigned within three days. (It is interesting to note that whatever imaginary problems could have developed from leaching from solar panels were miniscule compared to the very real problems the town already had but was unaware of. Just about all of the town's wells were soon found to have been long since contaminated with PFOA from a local factory. No residential wells could safely be used, and water from the town well could not be consumed until it had been fitted with a special filter to remove those toxins.)

My belief is that many people in Vermont have become victims of an anti-wind movement intentionally driven by instilling fear in them. People are afraid of "Big Wind." But they are not afraid of "Big Oil," which actually is making them sick, according to medical professionals.

The human health effects of wind power are one of the subjects I keep a special eye out for, as I do my daily blog post. Several years ago, I started noticing a growing body of papers were being published in Australian medical journals relating to those effects. It was clear that some people were getting sick around some wind farms, but not around others. Looking for the "smoking gun," various obvious commonalities were tested and rejected until one was found that produced a match. People around wind farms were showing more symptoms in proportion to the amount of exposure they got to anti-wind activists.

Careful to complete their work according to scientific procedures, researchers next tested groups of people to find out whether the activists might actually be the source of the problem. One group of volunteers was exposed to an anti-wind message on infrasound. Another group was told by a scientist that infrasound was not known to be connected to any symptoms. Both groups were tested with and without infrasound. Those who had seen the anti-wind video had increased

symptoms when they were told infrasound was present, regardless of whether it was or not. Those in the other group did not experience increased symptoms.

The Australian Medical Association ultimately published a position paper on the human health effects of wind turbines. They had concluded that the effects were real, but were not caused by wind turbines. They were caused by stress, which one person said was the result of “scare tactics by anti-wind activists.”

The problem of the human health effects of wind turbines would not go away, even if all the wind turbines were removed. The reason is that the hatred people use to motivate anti-wind activity will not go away — with any success, it will merely be directed at something else., which could be solar power or, just as easily, the dairy industry. Wind turbines are not the problem. Hatred is the problem. And that hatred is a problem we need to address, if we are to save ourselves from climate change.

Another thing that needs to be addressed is reality itself. I had the good fortune of sitting next to a leading anti-wind activist at a dinner and subsequent panel discussion. As we were getting up from the dinner, she turned to me and said, “You know, we shouldn’t even be talking about wind and solar.”

Surprised, I asked, “What should we be talking about?”

“The secret energy sources the government has developed, of course.”

“What energy sources?”

She was getting up. “There are too many to talk about now.”

“Can you give me one example?” I asked.

“Anti-gravity.”

No, I am not kidding.