

OUR VIEW

The folly of green energy politics

A dark cloud looms over the Somerset electric generating station. The coal-fired power plant is battered by market forces and, outside its host community, hostile sentiment. The plant is up for sale again, and the town that was so well fed by its productivity for decades is trying to plan a future without it.

Meanwhile, the specter of Lighthouse Wind is also looming large in Somerset. A preliminary proposal by Apex Clean Energy Inc. to install up to 70 industrial wind turbines on farm acreage in Somerset and neighboring Yates has residents up in arms. There's a veritable yard sign war going on in the area now, and for every posted sign reading "harvest the wind," there must be at least 10 sharply denouncing Lighthouse Wind as "too big, too close."

There's real irony in the sight of all those protest signs littering the landscape around an existing 650-megawatt power plant that's all but shuttered. If there's not enough demand for electricity to cause the operator to fire up its coal ovens and feed the grid, then why would anyone even consider investing in alternative generation?

Because of "green" politics, that's why. Obama administration politics. Cuomo administration politics. No matter how "clean" the emissions coming out of the Somerset smokestack may be, our President and the New York Governor have decreed that coal is dirty in all cases and must be stricken as a fuel source.

Governor Andrew Cuomo reiterated New York's position earlier this month at a climate change conference with former Vice President Al Gore, while restating a goal to see greenhouse gas emissions across the state reduced by 40 percent by 2030 and 80 percent by 2050.

"We established the state's first carbon dioxide emissions standard when siting new power plants which will ensure that no new dirty, coal-burning plants will be built in the state of New York, period. We are also repowering and converting or closing the existing coal plants," Cuomo said.

Considering the coal-fired IRG-Dunkirk's recent decision to shut down next January, and forego the state's offer to underwrite its conversion to natural gas powering, it seems safe to conclude that conversion — a retooling process that costs hundreds of millions of dollars, by the way — is not a real option for existing power plants, in this state particularly. The Cuomo administration is nothing if not consistent in its fear and loathing of all fossil fuels, regardless how well "smart" technology is able to mitigate emissions and other energy production-related pollution.

The Cuomo-Gore-Obama extreme version of good Earth stewardship demands we turn against fossil fuels entirely, regardless how many billions the power companies — no, make that power consumers — have sunk into existing infrastructure in recent decades, and switch all of our eggs over to different, carbon-free and supposedly cleaner baskets: solar, foreign hydro (remember the "giant extension cord" to Quebec?!) and wind.

The economic viability of these alternatives matters not, because there are state and federal subsidies aplenty for "green" energy producers. Hence Apex Clean Energy's largely unwanted overtures in Somerset and Yates, where people are greatly disturbed by the thought of up to 70, 600-foot-tall, "bird- and bat-killing, giant Cuisinarts in the sky" whirring overhead and spewing literally sickening infrasound all

over the place. How, exactly, do these things qualify as green, anyway?

Meanwhile, relatively clean coal-fired Somerset Generating Station sits dormant most of the time, the sky around it growing darker as storm clouds continue drifting in from Albany and D.C.

Imagine Somerset, New York, today as the picture of our state and national energy policy. Note how it appears neither smart nor clean. That's the folly of "green" energy politics.

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Five years on the 'too list'

GLIMPSES INTO THE PAST

50 YEARS AGO - 1965

The Lockport High School Class of 1910 held a 55-year reunion at the Park Hotel — Proposed air quality objective zones to combat air pollution in Niagara County will be the topic of discussion when a state health department public hearing is held at Mount View Hospital.

35 YEARS AGO - 1980

Personalized Christmas cards, from a "handsome collection of fine and unusual cards," can be ordered now from Korff Furniture — The time is now to set an appointment for Christmas portraits by Mayfair Studio. Sittings are in the studio, your home or the park.

20 YEARS AGO - 1995