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Wind turbines blow and they suck!



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“You got to know when to hold’em, know when to fold’em, know when to walk away, know when to run.” That’s not just a cool line from an old Kenny Rogers song. It’s good advice and it has served me well over the years... in poker and in business. I see a lot of similarities between life and poker: you can win a lot and you can lose a lot but most of the time you just keep watching the ante go up while you wait for a good hand. If you’re smart, you learn how the game is played and you never, ever draw to an inside straight.

A few years ago, I was going for a walk along the old (original) Lakeshore road in Bright’s grove – a beautiful stretch from Brigden Road to Perch Creek. It was a sunny day and there was a north wind blowing so the sky was quite clear and visibility was good. That’s when I saw them; the colossal wind turbine machines up by Ipperwash. As the crow flies that’s eight and half miles or 13.6 kilometers from where I stood. They are highly visible in those conditions and now the Ontario Government want to add forty two more and they have

plans for up to 500 more in this area. Last year I drove up to Tobermory and drove past over a hundred of them. They are huge and they are everywhere, and I began to wonder how the people felt when they had one that close to their property. I wouldn’t want one in my back yard and I sure as heck wouldn’t want one in my neighbour’s backyard. I am quite sure that there is only one reason the neighbour would even tolerate one in his backyard and that (I am afraid) is money. Nobody that I have ever met wants one in their yard, not even if they think it is good for the environment... and I know that on paper you can prove it’s good for the environment... as long as the wind is blowing when you need the energy. You can’t store the stuff in giant batteries, you have to send it somewhere and use it as soon as you create it and therein lies a major problem; the ability to produce on demand.

A few weeks ago I went to a wind energy presentation (and protest) in Camlachie. The event was sponsored by Suncor and took place inside the Camlachie Community Centre to promote the wind turbine energy project they have a contract with the Ontario government to build up near Ipperwash. Outside the Camlachie Community Centre the project was being protested by the people who did not want the wind machines installed. They’re called W.A.I.T. - We’re Against Industrial Turbines. After talking to the W.A.I.T. folks outside – mostly local residents who would be living up close and personal with the turbines, I went inside. There were lots of Suncor people there; most of them young, very friendly and eager to put our minds at ease with answers and brochures supplied by their company and its P.R. people. When I asked how much money they were spending on the project they told me, “Three hundred million dollars,” and gave me some data on the number of hours of employment that would

bring to Lambton County.



We all know that work is badly needed in our community. This would be good work too since it would mean union wages and that's good money plus they would buy a lot of cement. You would be amazed at the amount of cement used to anchor one of those things to the planet. When I asked their people how much money they were going to be paid for the energy they would create I was told eleven and a half cents per Kilowatt hour... a number which all the protestors I talked to thought was low but which the Suncor people stood by. When I asked about the noise issue – the hum caused by the rotation of the giant blades – they pointed to a non-Suncor specialist who had been hired by Suncor to help us, “get to the truth of the matter,” and he assured me that there was no noise at all. When I asked him about sub-harmonic frequencies which were not audible but sometimes caused other things to vibrate in harmony and thereby make a noise that seemed to bother people, notably children, he started talking to someone else and soon walked away. Then I asked one of the technical guys about the fact that the only people who seemed to be happy about this were the people who had contracts with Suncor to let them install the wind turbines on their land and that meant there were possibly 46 happy people and everyone else that I talked to was unhappy about it. He just sort of looked at me with a, “Not much I can do about that man,” type of look and I could see the he

was only doing his job and there aren't really any answers to that question except maybe, “tough shit,” which isn't a very good answer. Later it came out that even the 46 people who had turbines being installed on their land might not be so happy about it but we would never officially know, since there is a gag order on the deal once you take the down payment. So you not only can't get out of the contract, you also can't discuss how much money you are getting paid or even say that you are not happy about it.

Another factor that kind of bothers me is that it seems like we are being punished in Sarnia/Lambton for not voting Liberal. We lose the jail, a big coal-fired power plant, and they are even building another new natural gas power plant here at a ridiculous expense because a Liberal riding did not want the unit in their backyard. I can only imagine what those people would have said if Suncor had proposed building a wind turbine farm in Oakville or Burlington? The biggest area of concern would be for what it would do to property values: they wouldn't go up in value and we all know what property costs are like in Oakville and Mississauga. One other question I wish I had asked the Suncor guy was, “I am told that you will hire a guy just to go around to all the windmills and gather up the bodies of all the birds that get killed by these things... especially during the migratory seasons when birds with no local knowledge come through here. Is that true?” I wonder how the greenies rationalize that one.

I went home and started my research at a site called: windfacts.ca. They just love wind energy and have only good things to say about it by happy people who talk about how wind energy is “likely” to save money in the future. But every voice I could find who is for it has a vested interest in the project. Then I found a guy named Ross McKittrick, a Ph.D in

Economics at The University of Guelph who says that a typical residential electricity bill would rise about 7.9% annually over the next five years and half of that increase would be due to government investment in renewable energy. Do you want to hold cards like that? He goes on to say that wind energy is not only intermittent, the energy output is out of phase with the demand for the power since output declines in the morning when demand is increasing and increases in the evening when demand is decreasing. Wind energy output also peaks in the mid-fall when demand is decreasing since our air-conditioners are off and our furnaces are not yet on. So wind produces energy at times that we don't need it. When I hear that, I'm seriously thinking about folding.

According to the Auditor General of Ontario, in every year since 2006 the entire output of the wind sector is surplus to current demand and has been dumped on the export market at typically less than 4 cents per kWh. There are even times when we pay to get rid of the stuff. The Auditor General further states that between 2005 and 2011, Ontario lost over \$1.8 billion doing that and you and I are not asked to pay for it, we are told we have to pay by a guy who just resigned and walked away from the table.... with a lot of our money. I learned that Spain and Germany, the countries Ontario modeled their wind energy programs on, are losing their shirts on wind energy subsidies and doing everything they can to get out of the contracts. Now I'm not just walking away from the table, I'm running... and so should Kathleen Wynne now being called, Kathleen McWynnty since so far all she has done is admit that there might be a problem. What am I missing here? Please Kathleen, help me see what you see. Sure, I think renewable energy sources are fine as long as we can make the numbers work. We may even have to up the ante a little bit, but I wouldn't go betting our

farms on a deal that you only wish might work and which clearly isn't working in the countries you modelled this program after. The free market will not invest in this kind of energy unless they get a ridiculous, no lose guarantee from a government that wants to be judged by their intentions... not by their results.

Upton Sinclair once said, "It's hard to get somebody to understand something when their job depends on them not understanding it." When it comes to the wind turbine issue, I find that the people who totally understand and approve the issue are in on the deal and therefore are not motivated to understand the point of view of those who are not in on the deal which is only us, the poor schmucks who vote, pay taxes and then try to explain it all to our kids.

When I read books about future energy sources, I read about Helium 3 and micro-waved solar energy from space stations... not windmills. They will go the way of Don Quixote. Putting your money on windmills is like buying stock in Blockbuster... not a good long-term deal. Now that's just my opinion and I could be wrong but I think the wind should blow... not suck and for me, this deal definitely sucks.