

Headline: Time to shift to renewable energy

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The Olympic Games are over but I am still confused by the rules. Professional athletes are allowed in basketball, tennis and soccer, but not in boxing. Had professional boxers been allowed in boxing, Manny Pacquiao would have surely brought home a gold medal instead of the current Philippine Olympic team's zero haul. Ballroom dancing is not a sport (it was disguised as such by renaming it "dance sport") yet it is included in the Games, but golf, which is a true and very popular sport, is not. Why?

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The recent adverse weather conditions are undeniable proof that global warming is upon us. Global warming is worsened by greenhouse gases produced by man. Tops in the production of greenhouse gases is the burning of fossil fuels—oil, coal, natural gas—to produce energy without which the modern world wouldn't be the same. The exhausts from the millions of motor vehicles alone contribute greatly to greenhouse gases and to global warming. Even just the eating of meat contributes to global warming. The manure excreted by the billions of livestock—cattle, sheep, goats, buffalo, camels, chicken, etc.—raised by man to feed the world's meat eaters emit carbon dioxide, one of the greenhouse gases. Also, the fertilizer used to grow the food—corn, soybeans, etc.—for the livestock produce CO₂.

It is imperative that the world stop burning fossil fuels, which are, by the way, running out and therefore becoming more and more expensive, no thanks to the world oil cartel, the Opec (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). It is therefore comforting to hear that our own government is leading the way in the use of renewable energy sources—solar, wind, hydro, wave, and biomass.

Biomass is the organic matter—without the plastics and styrofoam—that we throw away every day in such great volumes that man has a difficult time collecting and disposing of them. And as we have seen recently, trash thrown away carelessly and that clogs drainage mains and waterways, is one of the causes of floods.

This garbage, or biomass, is burned to produce energy. It is therefore important that we learn to separate organic, or biodegradable, trash from the nonbiodegradable (plastics, styrofoam, metals, bottles, etc.) garbage that will not burn.

The good news is that our Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) approved last July 27 the Feed-in-Tariff (FIT) for four renewable power sources: biomass, solar, wind, and hydro. Power generation with biomass will not only generate electricity but also solve our problem of garbage disposal. Solar is free and plentiful in the Philippines, which is bathed in sunshine almost the whole year round. Wind is also plentiful, especially from politicians during the campaign period and congressional debates. And as we have seen, water is plentiful, so plentiful that the dams have to release water so they wouldn't break due to the water pressure. If we can harness all that free water to generate electricity, then we would have the cheapest electricity in Asia instead of the most expensive.

The issuance of the FIT rates is deemed crucial in boosting the local renewable energy industry as it would provide an incentive to developers with the assurance of fixed cash flow for their power

projects. This is a timely decision that will surely attract investments in the renewable energy sector and help the environment.

The ERC took some time to approve the FIT rates but I think it is only proper to consult all the stakeholders in the industry. I understand that this ERC process required a longer time than usual for studies to be fair to all stakeholders.

The ERC-approved FITs are lower than what was proposed by the National Renewable Energy Board in May 2011. The ERC approved a FIT rate of P9.68 a kilowatt hour for solar power from the applied rate of P17.96; P8.53 a kWh for wind from P10.37; P6.63 for biomass from P7; and P5.90 a kWh for hydropower from P6.15.

With the lower FITs, there will be less likely opposition from the anti-renewable energy advocates, some of whom, as previously mentioned, are funded by coal suppliers whose business would be affected by the entry of renewable energy investors.

The Department of Energy has expressed appreciation to the ERC for issuing the FIT rates. It also said that the rates brought relief to local renewable energy developers, who had put off their projects while waiting for the rates.

The ERC move provides a respite to an overburdened public that has to contend with the increasing cost of gas and electricity. Renewable energy sources are plentiful here. The cost of producing power from them is not subject to volatile political and economic geopolitical conditions in the countries from which we import fuel sources like oil and coal.

Renewable energy is also more environment-friendly and ecologically sustainable than imported fossil fuels.

This also jibes with the direction set by President Aquino, who has repeated in his policy speeches the urgent need to promote renewable energy. He has committed to the sustained growth of renewable energy in the Philippines' power mix to about 50 percent within a 10-year period.

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Energy Secretary Rene Almendras cited the ERC in ensuring a balanced view to be able to serve the needs of all stakeholders. He said he was hopeful that all stakeholders would continue to cooperate with everyone to establish a competitive and dynamic power market.