

Rittershaus, Alexander (HOU)

From: Keenan, John - Rep. (HOU)
Sent: Tuesday, December 03, 2013 12:59 PM
To: Eicher, Christopher, (HOU); Holland, Liam (HOU); Rittershaus, Alexander (HOU)
Subject: FW: Testimony by Dr. Wayne Klug on the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act (S.1591 and H.2980)

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From: Hunt, Randy - Rep (HOU)
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 10:23 PM
To: Keenan, John - Rep. (HOU)
Subject: Fwd: Testimony by Dr. Wayne Klug on the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act (S.1591 and H.2980)

John, this sums up my thoughts perfectly. I am in Austin tomorrow (Tuesday) for a meeting with the Texas Public Policy Foundation, so I will not be able to make our wind energy hearing.

Randy

Sent from my iPhone

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Begin forwarded message:

From: Wayne Klug <wklug@berkshirecc.edu>
Date: December 2, 2013 at 9:15:12 PM CST
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Subject: Testimony by Dr. Wayne Klug on the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act (S.1591 and H.2980)

Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation, Utilities, and Energy:

As a member of the Sierra Club, I've been an environmental activist for 25 years. I am Professor of Psychology at Berkshire Community College, where I co-created the school's recycling program and serve as faculty advisor to MassPIRG.

I was privileged to testify before your Committee at its hearing on the Wind Energy Siting Reform Act, held at Jiminy Peak two years ago. I would now like to testify on the current version of the bill, but as I'm unable to attend the State House hearing, I submit my testimony in the form of the comments below.

After participating in a study of western Massachusetts public opinion in 2012 and 2013, I'm now persuaded that the purpose of the wind energy siting reform bill contradicts public sentiment in the Commonwealth's rural hill towns.

Last year, I was one of 24 Berkshire and Franklin County residents randomly selected to attend a day-long symposium at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Organized by researchers from Macalester College and led by staff from the Consensus Building Institute in Cambridge, the event was held to measure public opinion in the hill towns of western Massachusetts on the question of industrial-scale wind energy.

Applicants were solicited by advertisement, and from a pool of 75 the team chose a sample that equally represented those supporting, opposing, and undecided about, wind power. Distributions of genders and ages were fairly even, and the sample included farmers, business owners, town officials, students, and teachers.

Although the symposium was held in the summer of 2012, polling results were released only this year. Curiously, the event itself received considerable press attention, but the findings did not. I offer this column as a partial remedy.

The program included presentations by wind advocates, large- and small-group discussions, and electronic keypad polling that provided feedback at several points throughout the day.

Although researchers focused on perceived landscape impacts from wind turbines, we also shared information about their cost-benefit, noise and health, wildlife habitat, tourism, and property-value implications.

According to the final report, about two-thirds of participants "thought the symposium facilitation was fair and balanced" and "75% left . . . feeling like they had a better understanding" of the issues.

Most of this "better understanding" seemed to reflect the critical thinking people do as they learn more. Polled responses to 21 of 23 "issues commonly associated with wind energy"—including job creation, health, quality of life, even clean energy—showed marked reductions in "positives", and increases in "negatives", from morning to afternoon.

The most noteworthy findings concerned "best practices": 96% supported local control over siting of industrial-scale wind projects (those supplying the grid), and 63% supported an "outright ban" in their own towns—or anywhere in the region. Surprisingly, the same number agreed that approval of such projects should require the unanimous consent of all landowners within a 3-mile radius.

Apparently reflecting skepticism of both government and industry claims, 88-92% called for “public transparency”, “more accountability by developers”, and, interestingly, “reliable analysis of offsets from other fuels”. Several felt “it would be more productive to push for energy conservation or solar energy projects.” Said one: “They put a turbine there not to make energy but to generate . . . tax credits.”

According to researchers, “a rural / urban tension also emerged,” with another participant summarizing the issue as “the industrial development of the Berkshires . . . for the sake of the energy centers in the East.”

Several months later, participants received a draft report and were invited to comment. I suggested that to help understand the level of opposition in the Massachusetts sample, one relevant consideration would likely be our population density relative to that of the other two states where symposia were held. Minnesota’s density rank is 31st, Michigan’s is 17th, and Massachusetts’ is 3rd.

One researcher had revealed a telling difference: In the midwestern symposia, participants tended to say they might accept development of 50 turbines but not 100, whereas some in Massachusetts found a single turbine acceptable but not three.

This dramatic difference in tolerance seems to reflect distinctions not only in population but also in landscape elevations, likely more dramatic here than in target regions of the other states.

This may explain why Massachusetts participants voiced less support for wind energy in the region than in the country as a whole. It would be tempting to conclude that a NIMBY effect was operating here, were it not for these issues of density and landscape values.

In fact, researchers identified Texas as hosting the most extensive wind development, which made sense to many of us, since the relatively vast spaces there, as in several windy midwestern states, may absorb negative impacts in ways that Massachusetts cannot.

In those states, huge tracts of sparsely inhabited lands support agriculture, do not for that reason support varied wildlife habitats, and generally lack both ridgelines and a dominant tourist economy. The divergence in national and local attitudes among Massachusetts participants likely reflects thoughtful consideration of regional differences in land use and size.

Despite what some participants felt was the symposium’s pro-wind slant, its findings nonetheless suggest that a majority of residents in the two most rural counties in Massachusetts distrust both the productivity claims made for wind power and the reasons given for installing it.

Almost unanimously, they value local control over decision-making, and for several reasons cited above, most oppose further industrial-scale projects such as those recently constructed in northern Berkshire and Franklin counties.

Based on these sentiments in the two Massachusetts counties most frequently targeted by wind developers, I urge your Committee to issue an unfavorable report on S.1591 and H.2980.

Thank you for the opportunity to enter this testimony into the record.

Wayne Klug, Ph.D.

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