

Alberta School Boards' education dollars 'blowin' in the wind'

Why are education dollars meant for the classroom being used to build a wind farm?

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CALGARY, AB, March 5, 2015/ Troy Media/ - A few years ago, Alberta School boards established a Commodities Purchasing Consortium, made up of school board administrators who sought to get better deals on large purchases by coordinating the buying power of otherwise independent school boards.

More recently they orchestrated a tender and chose a provider to build Alberta Schools their own purpose-built wind farm.

We happened upon this project quite by accident and found it alarming that the proponent was touting 'wind is free', when our research indicates that wind power is the most expensive form of power generation and the least reliable.

Education dollars better spent in classroom

We thought perhaps the purchasing consortium had been 'blinded' by eco-ideology and unaware of some of the costs, downsides and complications of wind power, so we sent them some material we had gathered from our network of local and international research sources. We had little response from school or government officials to our letters.

This was of concern because we are taxpayers with children and grandchildren at schools across the province. We'd rather see education dollars spent in the classroom than on an upstart wind farm project.



What a waste of education dollars

We continued our research and made several Freedom of Information and Privacy requests. We were alarmed at our findings. The proposed project as originally outlined required a 25-year commitment from participants. Many school board trustees rejected the proposal off the top for that reason alone – this being far outside their term of four years. One school board had signed on, and then had done a cost-benefit analysis and subsequently stepped out of the deal. We did not have access to all

documents, of course, but the references to the Regulated Rate Option as an example of future power price increases concerned us. Regulated Rate Options are much higher than wholesale prices that a bulk buyer like the school boards would pay.

Then, this past month the Market Surveillance Authority issued a statement that spot power prices in Alberta were at an all-time low.

So Friends of Science Society is asking the Honorable Gordon Dirks, Minister of Education, to review this project. We find there are several anomalies – some school FOIP documents indicated that the schools might use their reserve funds to finance an equity participation the wind farm project. This was alarming to us – more so because the school boards were only considering this because the Alberta government had rightly refused numerous requests to have the equity in the wind farm financed by the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, a government lending body that offers more favourable interest rates and terms for municipal infrastructure projects – not commercially owned wind farms.

With the downturn in oil prices, and Alberta in need of essential school infrastructure, we have many questions about this project, including whether the significant volunteer time of the school board administrators, suggested by the FOIP documents, was on taxpayer school time? Or outside of work hours?

According to a 2012 Morrison Park Advisors report on investor interest in the Alberta power market, there was no interest for wind investment in Alberta due to our low power prices. If the investment community doesn't see wind power as a good deal, why should school boards pick up the tab with taxpayer's education dollars?

Further, along the way we met with some of the rural people whose farms will be directly impacted by the wind farm and they are staunchly opposed. You can see why if you look at Ontario. Dozens of property owners have valueless homes or farmland now; many can't even live in their own houses. Due to the peculiarities of wind turbines (some of which are not known until the turbines are up and operating) the sound waves can cause direct disturbance to people's health – or oddly, sometimes a kind of acoustical bounce of sound waves leaves people unable to sleep in their bedrooms, but if they move outside into a tent, they are okay.

Who wants to trade their \$200,000 house for a tent in the yard? No one.

A question for the Honourable Minister

The Premier has said he is in favour of property rights. Wind power doesn't add 'free' power to the grid – in fact it requires more expensive natural gas back-up in the form of a peaking power plant, where the constant radical changes end up costing more and producing more emissions; any claimed benefits of 'cleaner' wind power are lost. And then... there's the price.

The *Economist* recently published an assessment of wind and solar compared to natural gas (which is even more expensive than coal) and renewables came out the most expensive.



So our question to the Hon. Gordon Dirks. Why build a wind farm with education dollars meant for the classroom?

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VIDEO: http://youtu.be/a5_Ofl2FN6w

Alberta School Boards – original wind farm proposal see pg 10 of pdf for power point:
http://www.holyspirit.ab.ca/cabinet/2/59/61/December_21,_2011_Agenda_Package.pdf

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