

A trustee speaks

Straight talk: climate change is a pocketbook issue

by Dee Mobley

Get ready folks. Your electric bills, which have been creeping upward for the last two years, may soon leapfrog upward, compliments of our politicians. If they leap nearsightedly onto the Climate Change Express, rushing to a zippy fix of global warming without any thought of the costs involved, much higher power costs will smack us all.

Everyone loves the idea of “free” wind and “free” solar power. Me too, if in fact both were as free as touted. What the wind and solar promoters fail to reveal is, when the wind doesn’t blow and when the sun doesn’t shine, the lights go off, computers don’t run and oxygen doesn’t flow in the hospital rooms. Unless somewhere in the back-ground, there is a hydro dam, a nuclear facility or a coal-fired plant ready to take over and churn out that electricity.

Engineers and tekkie folk are working hard to improve

storage batteries for wind and sun generation and to solve the transmission snafus that plague both. As always, it takes time and money. I think both technologies will make great strides in the next 10 years. So will the research into harnessing the tides, the waves, the nation’s garbage piles.

But we aren’t there yet. And it seems nonsensical for those in high places to pound their podiums and decide for us that 25 percent of all our electrical energy must come from solar and wind and garbage by some politically-correct date — regardless of cost to us. And oddly enough, state policy-makers have decided somehow that hydro power is not renewable unless it’s new, smaller projects of 10 megawatts or less?

What about “global warming?” Ask 10 people what they think of the climate change controversy and one will likely get eight frowns accompanied by, “I don’t really know,” one animated passionate response that

doomsday might be coming soon, perhaps next year, and one cynical comment that the whole issue is bunk.

Had I been asked five years ago, I would have said bunk. Since then, as a trustee for one of five co-ops seeking to build a coal-fired power plant near Great Falls, I’ve had to educate myself about climate change issues — about CO₂ levels, about mercury, about potential air and water and soil pollutants. In five years’ time, I have become convinced that climate change is happening, and we need to pay attention.

Whether mankind, and especially we energy-hungry Americans, are fully responsible for the changes or whether mostly natural cycles are in play, I don’t know. The radically different scientific claims, and the perhaps not-so-scientific claims, are confusing to us commonfolk. The issue is tremendously complicated.

One thing I do know, however, is that the present heck-for-leather political

pressures to “fix” global warming pronto could zoom up the electricity bills for all 120,000 consumers of Montana cooperatives.

That’s your pocketbook and mine. So get ready.



Dee Mobley is a trustee at Tongue River Electric, based in Ashland. She and her husband, John, ranch north of Broadus.

Editor’s Note:

Trustees who write on energy issues have not been force-fed an association “party line.” Remarks are personal views from “your neighbor across the back fence.” Contact Dee Mobley via the RM address.