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Cape Wind claims don't fit the bill

By **GLENN G. WATTLEY**
September 14, 2009

Over the past year, we have read several op-eds and letters to the editor debating the true cost of Cape Wind. After eight years of controversy, the Cape Wind developer has failed to prove that his costly private venture won't raise our electric bills. The Alliance has asked Gov. Deval Patrick to order an independent cost analysis to get Massachusetts ratepayers some well-deserved answers to the looming Cape Wind cost question.

In the absence of a formal cost analysis, we can look to Europe, California, and perhaps most importantly, Texas, for lessons learned.

First, let's consider the European experience. It's an accepted industry fact that offshore wind projects, especially those using the monopile wind turbines, require electric rates of at least 20 cents per kilowatt-hour including all subsidies. Germany for example is raising its rate for offshore wind power to 21 cents per kwh. In comparison, Cape Cod NStar customers are currently charged 11.9 cents per kwh for generation. Logic suggests that if Cape Wind produces electricity at the European rate, we would pay about double for Cape Wind's power.

Second, the Wall Street Journal recently published an article exploring California's current energy debacle. Arguably our nation's greenest state, California is struggling to keep the lights on because there is a lack of "backup power" for wind and solar power plants. When the wind does not blow or the sun does not shine conventional power plants are needed to ensure reliability. The key point is that electric rates in California are being increased to address this reliability issue. The Alliance has pointed out many times that backup power is a hidden cost that Cape Wind has ignored.

Finally, let's look at Texas, which has implemented a Green Energy Program supported by wind power. A recent report revealed that the average monthly electric bill increased about \$58 per month (almost \$700 per year) under this program.

Interestingly, Cape Wind developer Jim Gordon plans to build a renewable biomass plant to sell power to the city of Austin, Texas. To make the project economically viable, Austin executed a power purchase agreement with Gordon's American Renewables LLC that locks in the price of electricity at double the current market. We expect that Gordon's biomass project would raise the electric bills even more than the current increase of \$58 per month.

It's important to consider that the three examples above are from regions that have deregulated their electricity markets in an effort to promote consumer choice and affordability. Yet in these ostensibly competitive markets, power plant developers have still managed to sell power at higher prices that resulted in higher electric bills. In fact, while Cape Wind claims there will not be an increase in Cape and Islands electric rates, Jim Gordon has publicly stated that he is working on signing a power purchase agreement at a high price. Naturally, the cost of a high-priced power purchase agreement will be passed along to the customers, even in a free market system.

I have invited Mr. Gordon to bring his cost information to Cape Cod so he and I can engage in a friendly, spirited and informative debate. He has not accepted my offer.

Cape Wind supporters claim, "It's not the view it's the vision." The "vision" I see for Cape Cod is higher electric bills — in addition to barren fishing grounds, imperiled air and sea navigation and blighted vistas. Fortunately, other developers, like Blue H USA, are proposing deep-water wind projects that would allow us to protect our local environment, economy and public safety. We can finally say "yes" to wind, but "no" to Cape Wind.

Glenn Wattley is president

and CEO of Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound.

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