

Governor Douglas of Vermont Declares Big Wind Not Worth It

Rational government.

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Governor Jim Douglas took his clearest position yet on industrial wind projects in Vermont on Friday, saying they would be "an imposition" on Vermont's landscape.

Industrial wind turbines on ridge lines would not aesthetically suit Vermont's small scale landscape, Douglas, a Republican, said at a brainstorming session with leaders of large and small businesses Friday afternoon at the Gateway Center.

To give up Vermont's brand for an energy source that could only produce 6 percent of Vermont's energy needs isn't a good idea, Douglas said. "I can't make the case there's enough gain for the pain," he said. "I just don't think it's worth it."

Douglas said he has seen the wind farms in Quebec on the Gaspé Peninsula. "I think they are quite intrusive," he said. And the roads and power lines needed to operate big wind farms are "quite an imposition" on the landscape, he added.

"Appropriately scaled wind" is OK, Douglas said. He wants to encourage development of smaller scale energy sources, including the idea of one-meter wide, low elevation wind turbines for homeowners.

Dick White, president of Community National Bank and chairman of Vermont's wind power commission, also liked the idea of roof-top wind turbines.

Vermont could promote creative ways to use renewable energy on a small scale, a "Green Valley" of creativity and entrepreneurs, just as Silicon Valley in California was to the high-tech industry, Douglas said. "It would be cool, I think, if Vermont became known for that," White said.

Jay Peak Resort President Bill Stenger complimented Douglas for keeping good relations with Quebec and particularly with Hydro-Quebec, from which Vermont gets a third of its electricity.

"You've positioned the administration to take advantage of that relationship," said Stenger, who is chairman of the governor's new commission on keeping young Vermonters from leaving the state.

Nuclear Power

Then Stenger urged Douglas to take up another challenge: nuclear power, a source that has been promoted recently by Rep. Duncan Kilmartin, R-Newport, during energy forums. "I know it's politically challenging," Stenger said, "but Three Mile Island was 30 years ago." The near melt-down of that facility created such a backlash against nuclear power that no new nuclear plants have been built since in the United States.

"The technology of nuclear is so different than it was. Somewhere in the mix of things we need a revisitation of nuclear," Stenger said. "We can change the way these things are thought of."

Douglas did not give his opinion on building new nuclear power plants in Vermont. But he didn't reject nuclear power as an energy source either.

Douglas pointed out the upgrades at the Yankee nuclear plant in Vernon, which is producing 20 percent more electricity now after what he called an exhaustive safety inspection. "It's interesting when you see some environmentalists taking another look at nuclear power," Douglas said.

He also promoted his recent announcement of grants and incentives to help farmers and lower income Vermonters purchase small wind turbines and solar panels. He encouraged Vermonters to look at their own electricity usage, pointing to Harold Barrup who runs his own vehicles on cooking oil.