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**ANOTHER VIEW**

## A lot of hot air over wind energy

Although oil isn't a significant source of fuel for electricity generation, recent spikes in oil prices have increased fears that affordable supplies of fossil fuels are running short, heightening interest in renewable energy in Texas. After all, it isn't likely that we'll run out of sunlight, water and wind.

However, abundant supplies of renewable resources don't guarantee abundant supplies of affordable energy. Even with sizable subsidies, renewable energy generally is more expensive than energy produced from nonrenewable sources. We rely on oil, natural gas, coal and even nuclear power today because they provide us with more efficient, affordable energy than renewable alternatives. They're likely to do so for years to come.

Here's why: In Texas, most renewable energy comes from the wind, with West Texas the best place to find it. Unfortunately, the greatest need for energy is along I-35 and the Gulf Coast. At more than \$1 million a mile, it's expensive to build the infrastructure necessary to get West Texas electricity to the customers who can use it.

Years of federal subsidies for wind-generated energy haven't greatly reduced this cost.

For instance, for every thousand kilowatt-

hours of energy produced in the late 1990s, the federal government spent more than \$4,700 on wind research and development.

By comparison, the federal research and development investment for nuclear and coal power was only 5 cents per thousand kilowatt-hours. Even with these large investments of tax dollars, wind power costs 20 percent to 30 percent more — and still accounts for less than 1 percent of the electricity generated in the United States.

When the Texas Legislature deregulated the electric industry in 1999, it rightly focused its efforts on promoting competition as a way to lower prices for consumers while encouraging the growth and maintaining the reliability of power production. But to satisfy environmentalists and to encourage a diversified mix of electricity providers, the Legislature set a goal of adding 2,000 megawatts of renewable energy to our production capacity by 2009.

Regardless of whether this mandate was a wise decision, Texas is set to reach that goal several years early, and proponents of renewable energy are using this "success" to push for increasing the goal. This would be costly and wouldn't improve either reliability or the environment.

Renewable energy sources someday might be a sound alternative to fossil fuels. If and when they are, they'll be brought online without any encouragement from government. In the meantime, state policymakers should approach energy the way doctors approach patients: First, do no harm.

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