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## Winds of change

### Report says wind energy not efficient; advocates say technology continues to improve

By Jared Fields

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A report released Tuesday called for energy prudence and for Texas policymakers to "step back" from interference and subsidies in the wind energy industry.

Issued by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, "Texas Wind Energy: Past, Present, and Future" examined reliability, cost, transmission and storage issues in the state's growing wind energy industry.

The foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute founded in 1989.

Its mission is to generate research and data on state issues and lists its core principles as "individual liberty, personal responsibility, private property rights, free markets and limited government."

The report cited sources calling wind energy "the most expensive form of generation we have in Texas." In the report's conclusion, the foundation said wind energy "should be employed to the extent technologically feasible and economically worthwhile."

Wind energy produces less than 1 percent of the nation's energy supply, but the amount of electricity produced by wind increased by 45 percent in 2007.

Texas overtook California in 2006 as the leading wind energy producing state and has about a third of the nation's wind-generated electricity capacity.

The Abilene and Sweetwater area is home to some of the state's biggest wind farms. Sweetwater's wind farms, in fact, are often cited by billionaire T. Boone Pickens in his energy plan for the United States.

Greg Wortham, president of the West Texas Wind Energy Consortium, disagreed with the foundation's stance that the state should let wind power develop once the market is ready.

"We think the government needs to do things that encourage the development of domestic resources across the board -- not one type or the other," said Wortham, who is also the mayor of Sweetwater. "You make improvements by doing things."

Wortham said that waiting for every form of energy production to be as efficient as possible with no problems would prevent any energy plant from being developed and implemented.

"We wouldn't have a nuclear plant or a coal plant in the United States or a refinery if we waited to solve every problem," Wortham said. "You do your best, and you keep moving forward."

The report, authored by Drew Thornley, listed the unpredictability of wind, along with the lack of energy storage and transmission lines as reasons the wind energy market should find solutions rather than being pushed by mandates.

Although the report discusses only wind energy, Wortham said wind energy is not the only energy option.

"Our group certainly isn't opposed to any sort of fuel source," Wortham said. "We encourage the domestic production of oil, wind, solar and nuclear (energy)."

Thornley's report shows the higher cost of wind energy compared with oil and natural gas, but Wortham said progress is being made to reduce the costs of wind energy and make it more efficient.

"People are working on energy storage strategies. No one's solving nuclear waste either," Wortham said. "But that doesn't mean we shouldn't build the next-generation nuclear plant."



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