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Article published Oct 7, 2009
Posted on
Wednesday, October 07, 2009



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Success Proves Elusive For Green Jobs Funding
How's that stimulus funding for green jobs working out?

Kathleen Hartnett White of the Texas Public Policy Foundation reports those jobs are arriving -- but they're temporary, expensive and won't deliver on the Obama administration's promises.

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"Your tax dollars from the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) have begun to flow freely to 'renewable energy facilities' in Texas," Ms. White says. "The stimulus bill tagged at least \$110 billion for 'clean' energy projects. The Penescal Wind Farm in Sarita (near Corpus Christi) recently received a \$114 million stimulus grant. Penescal Developers will use the money to double the size of the facility."

A closer look shows the stimulus money will simply serve to prop up an industry that's full of hot air.

"Wind farms already are heavily subsidized, without which there would be few if any on the ground," Ms. White notes. "When federal subsidies lapsed in 2000, 2002, and 2004, wind farm development ceased. According to the U.S. Energy Information Agency, total federal subsidies for electric generation from wind in 2008 were \$22.37 per megawatt hour, compared to 25 cents for natural gas."

The wind farm in Sarita promises to produce enough electricity to power an additional 70,000 homes. "Seven thousand homes might be a more accurate figure," Ms. White says. "The 84 additional turbines at the Sarita facility will increase the installed capacity by 200 megawatts, but the actual electricity generated by wind farms is much lower than their installed capacity."

That's because a wind generator doesn't always operate at its peak output. In 2008, Texas wind farms generated electricity at a rate of 8.7 percent of installed capacity. Sometimes the wind just doesn't blow.

The Sarita wind farm will produce up to 200 jobs, developers say.

"Dividing the \$114 million rebate by the 216 jobs, one arrives at a cost of more than \$500,000 for each job," Ms. White says. "And are not most of the jobs for temporary construction? According to our state comptroller's employment data, each 100 megawatts of installed wind generation supports no more than eight permanent jobs."

There's an ill wind blowing for the industry, she contends. The stimulus money will run out, and the realities will remain.

"The growing subsidies for wind power mask wind's high cost and inherent limitations, but only for so long," Ms. White says. "Although appealing to many, wind power is an extremely expensive, inefficient, and unreliable source of electricity, incapable of providing base load power. Wind's intermittency, variability, line loss, necessary back-up generation, transmission needs, and dispatch complexity limit the amount of electricity wind can secure. Ever larger mandates and subsidies will not make wind power more economically viable, as the European experience now demonstrates."

Alternatives exist -- clean-burning natural gas, for example, and even cleaner nuclear power. Real energy diversification -- and real "green jobs" will come from developing these, rather than continuing to subsidize inefficient wind power.