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THURSDAY, JULY 26, 2007

Power Shift

- posted by Jack Darin

Historically, whenever Illinois has passed major energy legislation, environmentalists have made good arguments about the impacts of energy production and consumption, worked long and hard to educate legislators, and then ended up with the table scraps from the real deal (studies, task forces, voluntary goals, some new dollars dwarfed by the boatloads sent to coal and nuclear power.....).

Now, the General Assembly is poised to approve a mandate that 25% of our electricity come from clean, renewable sources like wind by 2025; and to require that utilities plan for helping us customers use less energy.

The environmental benefits of the clean energy pieces of the rate deal are as significant as the shift in the politics of environmental protection in Illinois.

What's changed? Why are we poised to set off in an entirely new direction on energy policy, instead of throwing more money at the same old, dirty system?

Here's my take on some of the key factors -

-State Senator Don Harmon (D-Oak Park), seeing in January that the rate crisis would make energy one of the session's top priority issues, introduced the Affordable, Clean Energy Standards Act (ACES). State Representative Deborah Graham (D-Oak Park) carried it in the Illinois House. The rate deal essentially incorporates the ACES goals for renewable energy (but strengthens them), and for major new energy efficiency programs.

-Attorney General Lisa Madigan and her team insisted that targets for renewable energy development and energy conservation be a part of any final deal. Her smart and dedicated team made sure that the deal worked for consumers and for our environment.

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-ComEd and Ameren seem to be realizing that green power is good business, and they ended up to committing to reach ambitious, but achievable goals.

-Speaker Madigan and President Jones kept open minds about talks that started on the narrow topic of a rate freeze or refund. Many rank and file members of both parties understood the importance of clean energy as part of a rate solution, and spoke up for it.

-Governor Blagojevich, while not a direct party to the negotiations, did set the bar last fall with his Sustainable Energy Plan. The clean energy components of the rate deal reflect components of that plan, and his Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity will have a major role in running the new energy conservation programs.

-THE PEOPLE of Illinois are demanding better energy policies. We have never had more people from all over the state standing up to do their part to solve global warming.

From the back of the pack to setting the pace, these are truly exciting times in Illinois, and the results are good for us all.

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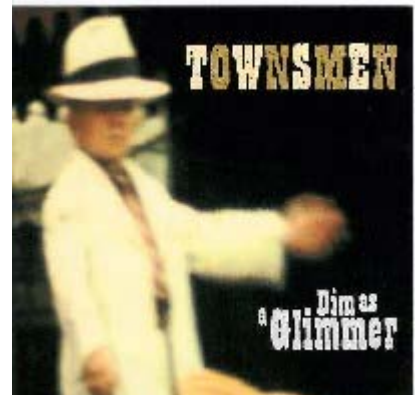
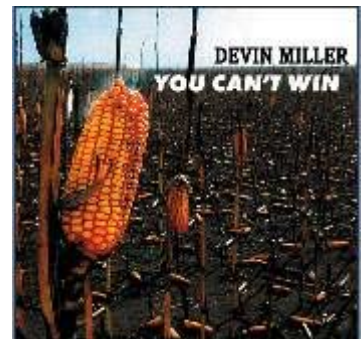
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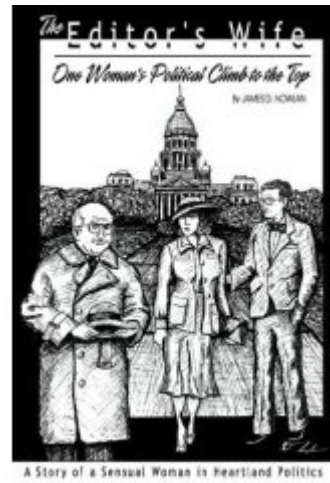
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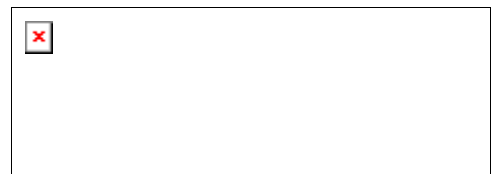
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