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Energy sources

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As another former chairman of the Illinois Commerce Commission (whose term lasted only seven weeks because previously I had been a consumer advocate), I take issue with former Chairman Dan Miller's criticism of the current commission for approving long-term contracts for wind and other renewable power generation.

Like other renewable energy sources, wind supply is inexhaustible, produces no waste, causes no pollution, and its costs are neither subject to market nor geopolitical volatility. A diverse electricity generation mix, including resources with zero fuel costs such as wind, is part of a prudent procurement strategy, as well as a contributor to state economic growth and environmental protection. The Illinois legislature recognized this when it passed a law requiring that a growing portion of all electricity used in Illinois come from renewable resources in coming decades, a fact which apparently has escaped Miller's attention.

Miller also seems not to understand that wind farms and crop farms co-exist on the same land. A 1,000-acre Illinois farm can accommodate about a dozen large wind turbines, providing from \$30,000 to \$40,000 in new farm income, while taking less than 1percent of its land out of crop production.

The contracts to which Miller objects would represent about 3 percent of total consumer electricity purchases. Long-term contracts are likely to save consumers money over their 20-year terms, and will certainly provide greater cost stability than buying such electricity exclusively through annual bids subject to volatility and uncertainty. We have no way of predicting whether renewable electricity will ultimately be cheaper than the market-priced coal power it will largely replace, because we don't know the magnitude of costs that will be imposed on carbon dioxide emissions or what prices the energy markets will produce. Apparently Miller believes that the cost of carbon will always be zero and that fossil-fueled power will always be cheap, but it would be short-sighted public policy to base our long-term state energy strategy on those assumptions.

-- *Martin R. Cohen, Chicago, former executive director, Citizens Utility Board, adviser to the Illinois Power Agency*

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