

Lt. Governor Phil Scott's response to Burlington Free Press Candidate Q&A:

What is the right path for wind energy development in Vermont?

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I've been an ardent supporter of renewable energy over the years for many reasons. The quicker we reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and foreign oil, the sooner we become more self-reliant. As a student at UVM, I was part of a team that built a wind generator for the campus, and when I built my house in 2009, I incorporated a solar hot water system into its design. So I absolutely recognize the benefits of renewable energy, and not only do I talk about the importance of investing in these technologies; I've also made these investments myself.

Having said that, I also believe it makes sense for Vermont to impose a 2-year moratorium on the development of new wind projects, until those currently in the works can be completed and their performance objectively assessed.

After we see the numbers -- the kilowatt-hours generated by each turbine, the cost for delivery of that power to homes and businesses, the reliability of that power stream, and so forth -- we'll know for sure what these projects can give us. We'll also know what the effects are on birds, bats, and other native species, as well as the environmental costs of the transportation and construction of all of that infrastructure -- so we'll have more information on what the wind towers can take away.

In short, we'll have hard facts with which to answer the question everyone is asking: Is it really worth it to give up our unspoiled ridgelines to wind towers?

As I stated earlier, I agree with the proponents of wind that renewable energy technologies have a lot of promise. Although some of these technologies are unproven, the only way we'll be able to explore their potential is by giving them a try. So I don't object to any of the projects currently in the works. If we don't take a chance once in a while, we'll never move forward.

I do, however, think it's a mistake to charge ahead blindly. It also bears mentioning that the opponents of industrial wind in Vermont aren't just the people whose own property backs up to the ridgelines. The shadow of each giant wind tower will extend much farther than the typical "backyard," because one of our major economic drivers is tourism. A beautiful view is an asset for many more

Vermonters than those who can see it from their kitchen window. And in this case, beauty really is “in the eye of the beholder.”

The bottom line is, I can see both sides of this issue. I absolutely believe that wind can be part of a balanced approach to our energy future, but until we have enough information to weigh those conflicting interests, there’s no way we can make an informed judgment. That’s why I think a 2-year moratorium makes sense.

No leader should make a decision without considering all of the facts. And in this case, the facts just aren’t in yet.