

Making ‘dirty energy’ a thing of the past

Ted McIntyre

In the battle of ideas over our clean energy future, the Editors of the Gazette win hands down. The Editor’s call for a thoughtful but steady move to 100% clean energy by mid-century (March 3) is worthy of our approval. Their wisdom is in sharp contrast to a recent letter (March 17) that is an assembly of misleading arguments.

The author of that letter asserted that supporters of the plan want “the same living conditions as the Pilgrims.” This is ridiculous. The root fallacy is the idea that oil and electricity are one and the same thing. They are not! Oil can be used to make electricity, but so can wind turbines. The technology is ready to go. All we need is the political will to act.

The author also tried some rhetorical tricks by pointing out that our state’s reductions alone will not solve the global problem of climate change. This is a straw-man argument, since no proponent of the clean energy bill makes this claim. What the author deliberately obscures is that our state has always been a leader on important issues. Our state can profit from the new technologies of clean energy. By teaching ourselves how to build a clean energy economy, we can spread the lesson to the rest of the world while reaping jobs and growth in the process.

The next whopper the author told was this: “scholars who accept the science” call for carbon pollution reductions of “25 to 30% over the next 50 years.” This is a falsehood. The truth is that, if we wish to maintain a livable world, we must reduce our carbon pollution to near zero by 2050. The Massachusetts proposals are consistent with what the science tells us is needed- an aggressive move to a ‘de-carbonized’ energy system.

The core of the author’s complaint was about the “economic consequences” of our energy choices. He touted the “steep fall” in oil prices, without acknowledging either the destructive nature of fracking or the extreme greenhouse effect of the natural gas that is leaked before being burned. He urged us to ‘consider the economic consequence of what (we) advocate.’ In fact, academics have studied the economic consequence of burning fossil fuel. They know there are costs of doing so (like global warming) that are not included in the price we pay at the pump. These are called ‘market externalities’ in the language of economics, but in ordinary language they mean ‘you can pay me now (at the pump) or you can pay me later (with sea level rise.)’ The other economic consequence of moving to clean energy is a vibrant and growing state economy. Every clean energy project helps keep money here in our local economy instead of going to unstable petro-states overseas. In economic language this is called the “multiplier effect” but in ordinary language it means keeping the money close to home.

Mr. Tuerck is wrong. The Editors of the Gazette are right. We need 100% clean energy.

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