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ENSC 230 – Energy and the Environment: Economics and Policy
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Nebraska's Secret

I believe that an issue that has really been put on the back burner because of local politics and Nebraska's Public Power district program is Nebraska's wind potential. According to the American Wind Energy Association, Nebraska has the 4th highest wind power potential in the U.S. A bill should be passed through the state's legislature that calls for a mandate on how much energy needs to be from renewables per year. Nebraska's generally conservative views may make a renewable energy mandate seem impossible, but the economic and environmental gains would be hard to brush off. A new approach to wind energy would be a huge contribution to our energy and eliminate coal if implemented effectively at an economically friendly rate. We need to start leading the country in clean energy.

It may seem that we are further from a wind powered electricity supply than we really are – in fact, implementing a new policy in the form of a mandate is all we need. A mandate with a minimum amount invested into research and development along with an increasing percentage of total power provided by wind per five years would be effective. The state could also coax a new wind manufacturer, hopefully a progressive and innovative manufacturer, into the state and installation prices would be lower due to smaller transportation distances for the turbine parts. In state access would make Nebraska wind farms cheaper to build and would add new jobs to our economy. The combination of these new approaches would create economic feasibility and add jobs to the Nebraska workforce.

Researchers are finding more and more efficient ways to utilize wind power. For example, a new company - Saphon Energy Team - has created a 'turbine' with no moving parts, sound, or negative side effects associated with conventional windmills (noisy, headaches). This new technology avoids harming birds, which at times is a reason that even environmentalists oppose windmills. It is also 45% cheaper and more efficient. If we were to invest in Saphon Energy and let our state be their testing ground, our state could have the potential to be a leader in wind power within a few years.

Nebraska has public power that must provide electricity at a minimal/affordable rate. The mandatory low rate inhibits them from necessarily trying new technologies because they must keep their costs low. While some people see this as an obstacle, we could use it as an opportunity to factor in the externalities (pollution) that are normally excluded from costs. If our state were to mandate wind power and ensure the public power providers the funds while installing wind turbines, the economic benefits could be unparalleled. It could create hundreds of manufacturing jobs and potential for office jobs and large investments in the community. It could increase the population of Nebraska and draw attention (and young people) to the state because of our exciting approach to clean energy. Although the start up costs may be high, all an industry like wind needs is a kick-start to get the ball rolling, which could translate into a booming Nebraskan economy.

In the book *Hot, Flat, & Crowded*, author Thomas Friedman notes that there could be a tiered payment system like that of a cell phone company. If you wanted to ensure the energy you received was generated/offset by renewable (wind power) energy, you could pay a premium to fund the continued development of the bladeless turbines. People who wanted the cheapest option for power would have that opportunity and only pay a few more cents per kilowatt hour.

Those that chose to pay a premium for the offsets could receive incentives, such as free solar panel installation on roof of home after 5 years of the plan. Different variations and incentives in accordance with the plan could dramatically alter the price people are willing to pay for energy and the social norms aspect of “everybody else is doing it.”

As a college student at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln, I don't know that any of my peers are content with our current energy infrastructure. We realize that coal simply isn't going to last forever and can't due to its high CO₂ emissions – which causes the greenhouse gas effect that is slowly but surely warming our planet. Nebraska could make a name for itself (aside from the Huskers), have a large positive impact on our local economy, and lead the nation in clean (zero carbon) energy generation policy. What are we waiting for?