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Making renewables profitable for Lincoln Electrical System

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Op-Ed IV: Jack Mensinger

Making renewables profitable for Lincoln Electrical System.

The potential for Nebraska to integrate renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind, in a financially sustainable and profitable method, has been proposed and shot down. Too many Nebraskans continue to doubt and reject renewables due to the perception that they are too expensive and the continued cost over traditional energy sources are too high.

Most of Nebraska's energy comes from coal, (63%) as of 2018, with the remainder lying primarily in nuclear (15%), and wind (14%). With the innovations and adoption of renewables by other states, what is keeping Nebraskans from joining the renewable party? The primary reason stated by state residents is that the upfront cost far exceeds the savings to be had. Many believe that they would be paying for someone to install a solar panel or a windmill on their property to power their homes, which they find extremely unappealing.

While many Nebraskans are correct about the relatively high cost that it takes to install renewables, many are unaware of the other costs incurred by continued reliance on coal-fired power plants and burning natural gas. Estimates show an increase in temperature and humidity due to increases in atmospheric carbon will put rural Nebraska at a climate similar to Texas, which mainly produces cotton. The change in climate is relevant to Nebraskans, as highly subsidized corn for ethanol plants will no longer be a potential crop for farmers

One of the big drawbacks of renewable energy sources is the costs associated with buying individual renewable systems, but, pushing forward renewables to public power entities is by far the most affordable way to consume cleaner energies. Many public power suppliers around the country are now increasing the percentage of renewables in the power they are selling while Nebraska's power suppliers are falling farther behind. There are many ways that they can offset the generation of energy with renewable infrastructure.

Renewable energy has increasingly become about politics more than what is best for us and the world we inhabit. If we look at it from a strictly utilitarian standpoint, we see that

reducing the use of carbon centric fuel sources will help to mitigate the effects of climate change, also a political issue, and preserve the ability for farmers to continue their practice.

The Nebraska Power Plan, that was finalized in January of 2017, was a plan for integrating a renewable portfolio into the Lincoln Electrical Systems (LES) offerings. It was created by a coalition of environmental groups to show potential profit for LES in renewable infrastructure. The plan was a comprehensive analysis by industry experts who gave multiple potential ways that LES could implement wind and solar farms around the state, reduce their overall costs, and

make them more profitable in the end. The resource was submitted to LES and a petition started to garner support for the document to be implemented by the power provider but ended in a lack of response from LES after the petition failed to find traction.

The people of Nebraska are wary of the cost of renewable and have been for decades.

We should be invested in where our power comes from because it gives us a greater degree of independence and insurance against the forecasted increase in cost

for carbon-emitting fuel sources. As the costs of climate change increase, there is a high likelihood of a tax being placed on carbon emissions which would increase the cost of energy for all consumers, but, with a higher degree of renewable integration, residents can have a secure and sustainable source of energy. The most effective way to create change is to move politicians to action and let them know that we want this change and that we may be willing to pay a bit extra now, to save massively in the future. Although Nebraska lies within the greater Southwest power pool, there are many opportunities to make this area the leader in global wind energy production. With a congregation of states with such high wind potential, why is Nebraska the only state that isn't taking advantage of this resource?

A change to a more renewable-based power would help start Nebraska on a pathway that could help the state weather the storm to come. Moving away from the tax incentivized coal system could help garner change in the direction that best supports our future. Climate change is going to have a dramatically disproportionate effect on those who rely on the land for income and production over those who are in the city, but we often see the reverse when it comes to concern about the upcoming shifts.

Regardless, climate change is going to affect the way we live our lives, and how we produce our power, so moving to an increasingly efficient means of power production looks to be the future for all states, including ours.