

## **WINDPOWER, SCHMINDPOWER, IT'S THE CARBON THAT MATTERS**

By Paul Brown

David Buhrman's column (Greenbrier County Group Opposes Windfarm) makes several good points. However, it's factually inaccurate in a number of regards. Windfarms are economically viable, as demonstrated by the large numbers of them in countries like Spain. There's little opposition to them there, because they're esthetically beautiful, they're placed in areas where they don't lower property values, and provide power at competitive prices without contributing to global warming. The greatest opposition to them is found in areas where coal has traditionally been the source of electricity – not coincidentally, the places Mr. Buhrman refers us to for anti-wind sentiments. The coal and petroleum industries combined are the largest business in the world, controlling the economies and governments of many countries. They have fought like tigers to deny global warming, delaying much-needed action for decades. Objections from them and their sympathizers are disingenuous to say the least.

Contrary to denials of scientists-for-hire working for fossil fuel interests, global warming is here. It's not a part of natural climate cycles. Its main cause is atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) produced by human combustion of fossil fuels. Our carbon dioxide emissions are more than can be removed by natural processes (mostly by photosynthesis), causing accumulation over the years. Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> is now more than twice as high as pre-industrial levels, and climbing at an unprecedented rate. We're increasing our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions rapidly, because of the population explosion, increased per capita use of fossil fuel energy, and decreased efficiency of use.

With the current high CO<sub>2</sub> level in the atmosphere global air, water and land temperatures are rising. We've now entered a positive feedback phase, where increased temperatures cause decreased albedo (reflection of sunlight by Earth's ice and snow cover) due to melting, and increased outgassing of CO<sub>2</sub> from land and water. These in turn are causing global warming to accelerate. This feedback process will soon reach the runaway phase where nothing we do can stop it. We don't know exactly when. In the meantime our planet is undergoing the sixth mass extinction in its history, mostly due to habitat destruction and – you guessed it – global warming.

I refer you to one of thousands of publications on this topic, by a scientist who is highly respected in these areas of research: *The Weather Makers*, by Tim Flannery (2006). In Australia, where the government is not waging a war on science the way it is here, his testimony has had a favorable influence on national legislation.

Since we don't know how much time is left, we must assume that immediate emergency action is needed. What if I'm wrong? In that case, we will have averted catastrophe at an earlier stage, at lower cost, and we can move to sustainability more quickly.

We need to lower global population by a factor of at least 10, to the level just two hundred years ago. Don't believe the professional deniers who maintain perpetual population growth is good. We also have to drop CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to zero because it will take one or two centuries to remove the excess CO<sub>2</sub> already in the atmosphere. That means we have to stop burning carbon. Everywhere. In ten years, starting with reduction by half right now through rationing. There's no such thing as clean carbon energy,

because you can't make energy from carbon without making CO2 and you can't bury CO2 in the quantities we produce. And we can't use nuclear energy because we already have more nuclear waste than we know what to do with. There are many sources of renewable energy that are economically viable. Wind and solar are the two best choices for most of the world. As with any energy source, they have to be used responsibly, with careful assessment of environmental impact. One thing we know for sure: their impact is far less than fossil fuels. And replacing carbon energy with renewable energy will provide plenty of employment.

We can do it. But every dollar (and we're talking about trillions of dollars in the next decade or so) spent on biomass, CO2 sequestration, and nuclear, let alone coal, gas and oil, is a dollar which will not be spent on wind and solar power for many years to come. We don't have many years. We won't have a chance to correct the mistakes we're committing to. Hold every politician's feet to the fire. If they won't go with this agenda, don't vote for them.

Paul Brown is a professor of Physiology at West Virginia University and author of *The Clock is Ticking*, a weekly column on overpopulation, global warming, and mass extinctions. He can be contacted at [pbrown@clockticking.com](mailto:pbrown@clockticking.com). This article was submitted as a letter to the editor of The Highlands Voice and came with this preface:

"I'm concerned that articles like David Buhrman's are coming indirectly from the coal companies. They frequently have misinformation known to be spread by the coal interests. I hope you will consider the following article for the Highlands Voice. It addresses wind power from the perspective of the current global warming crisis, something that should be foremost in the minds of all your readers."