March 14, 2021

To the Editor:

I am pleased to see that the Marietta Times is concerned about the environmental impact of energy sources, as demonstrated by their editorial which appeared in the March 11, 2021 edition.

The editorial was referring to the Vineyard Wind Project off the coast of Massachusetts, which would involve the establishment of off-shore wind turbines to generate electricity for homes in New England. The Times was seeking as strict environmental review of this project as is done for projects involving extraction (fossil-fuel) industries. I wish that the Times were as concerned about environmental impacts in our own and their own backyard as it is about wind turbines in New England..

First of all, it should be noted that greenhouse gas emissions for coal are 888 tons per gigawatt hour, natural gas 499 tons, and wind 26 tons. Fossil fuels are the leaders of negative environmental impact. These figures are reported by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a collection of the foremost scientists from around the world. Their conclusion about establishing facilities for these different sources of energy: “Contrary to claims of some critics, today’s research shows the hidden emissions due to building wind turbines, solar panels, and nuclear plants are very low, in comparison to the savings from avoiding fossil fuels.”

Coal has virtually been abandoned as an affordable and environmentally sound source of electricity generation. The free market has priced it out of picture in competition with natural gas. Even the energy companies themselves are shutting down coal-fired power plants. The extraction, transport, and burning of coal are dangerous, costly, and the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions of any energy source.

But natural gas has its own problems of environmental impact. For example, in Appalachian Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, there are numerous abandoned oil & gas wells spewing methane (natural gas) into the air. Natural gas is at least 82 times more significant as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Close to home for us in southeast Ohio is the issue of Class II injection wells, where fracking waste is permanently stored in the ground. Washington County is among the Ohio counties with highest number of injection wells and the most number of barrels of fracking waste injected into its lands. Fracking waste comes not only from production wells in Ohio but from production wells in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, two states which have stricter rules about injecting fracking waste from their production facilities.

Spills at these injection well sites are not uncommon. Last fall there was a spill at the Redbird #4 injection well, which is located in western Washington County, and in January 2021 there was a spill just outside Marietta at a site owned by Deep Rock Disposal of Marietta. Of course, natural gas companies are not required to inform the public of the contents of fracking waste, much of which is thought to contain toxic materials and much of which is radioactive. There was no reporting of either of these two recent spills by the Marietta Times. Neither has the Times investigated or questioned the incompetent and under-resourced monitoring of these injection wells by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Oil & Gas Resource Management.

.I respectfully suggest that the Times direct its attention to environmental impacts closer to home and related to the extraction of coal and the shale-gas industry including the process of hydraulic fracturing (fracking). Readers of the Times are more interested in these stories than in vague remonstrances about the environmental impact of off-shore wind turbines in Massachusetts.

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