

OPINIONS

Renewing the renewable-energy debate

From afar, the five windmills looked like nothing more than toothpicks. But as our fishing boat drew close to the 30-story structures, the couple of dozen people in our group hurried to the vessel's bow to take in the majestic sight of them.

On a sunny October day, I joined a tour of the offshore wind farm constructed last year in the Atlantic Ocean 3.8 miles southeast of Block Island, R.I. On our approach to the windmills, we lingered for a minute, in awe of the structures towering above us. Then out came the cell-phones to snap photos and selfies.

The Block Island Wind Farm, built by Rhode Island-based Deepwater Wind, was indeed a sight to behold. It's intended as a "demonstration" project to show that offshore wind is a viable, economical form of energy production. I had long dreamed of visiting the wind farm, as I'm a big believer in renewable energy, particularly offshore wind, as a means to reduce fossil fuel use and stave off the worst effects of climate change, including stronger hurricanes.



SCOTT
BRINTON

In the early 2000s, I covered the Long Island Power Authority's campaign to construct a wind farm 3.5 miles south of Jones Beach. After a decade of planning, however, LIPA killed the project in 2007, before construction began, because of cost concerns. Original projections estimated that the wind farm, with 40 turbines — enough to produce 1 percent of the Island's energy needs — would cost \$356 million. A later study suggested it could run as high as \$811 million, which would have meant a monthly \$2.50 surcharge for ratepayers.

At the time, I noted in a column that construction costs would likely rise over time, so why not build immediately? Even if they didn't, I argued, we should get

going on offshore wind sooner rather than later.

The Jones Beach project was supposed to be America's first offshore wind farm, and Long Island was supposed to become a hub for wind turbine manufacturing. Rather than construct planes and spaceships, as we did during Grumman's long reign, we were supposed to build windmills. That never happened, however.

Instead, we ceded the global offshore wind turbine market to Europe, which already had a decade-and-a-half jump on building offshore wind farms by the time we even had the final blueprints and schematics for one: Denmark constructed the world's first offshore wind farm in 1991.

In a competitive bidding process last December, Norway's Statoil won the right to erect offshore windmills 11 miles south of Jones Beach, paying a record \$42.46 million for 79,350 acres of the Atlantic Ocean, according to the federal Bureau of Ocean Management.

I was reminded of all this last Friday when I attended Vision Long Island's 16th annual Smart Growth Summit in Woodbury and sat in on a panel discussion on the state of solar power on Long Island.

A small group of activists fought the Jones Beach wind farm in the mid-2000s because, they argued, it would ruin their view of the Atlantic. Save Jones Beach members spoke often about solar energy as an alternative to offshore wind. We should grab low-hanging fruit, they contended, by erecting land-based solar arrays wherever we could, and by insulating buildings like crazy to make them more energy-efficient, before we "industrialized" the ocean.

The solar/energy-efficiency route was precisely the direction that LIPA took, and continues to take — though it does now plan to construct the nation's largest offshore wind farm 30 miles east of Montauk Point to help power the Island's South Fork. Deepwater Wind, the company

that is building it, estimates that the 15-turbine project will cost \$740 million to \$1 billion and be completed in 2022.

So, how did the solar/energy-efficiency plan pan out?

Since 2011, PSEG-LI has managed Long Island's energy grid for LIPA. To date, solar arrays have been installed on 40,000 of the Island's 1.1 million residential and commercial rooftops, supplying roughly 4 percent of our energy needs, according to Mike Voltz, PSEG-LI's director of energy efficiency and renewables and a Smart Growth panelist. Most of the arrays were installed in recent years.

Tax credits to encourage people to erect solar panels on homes and businesses are drying up, though, so we are seeing a slowdown in the number of Long Islanders going solar, with a 20 percent drop over the past year, Voltz said.

In an extended online opinion piece in Rolling Stone last Friday, "Winning Slowly Is the Same as Losing," Bill McKibben, the famed environmentalist and Middlebury

College scholar, wrote that we must — must — go all in on renewable energy if we hope to slow sea-level rise caused by global warming. The trouble is, as far as I'm concerned, we continue to plod along with demonstration projects and underfunded incentive programs, when we need to go faster — a lot faster.

We mustn't argue about which forms of renewable energy are best. They're all better than fossil fuels — coal, oil and natural gas. And when it comes to beating back global warming, it's a now-not-later proposition, as McKibben rightly noted. It has been for decades.

Scott Brinton is the Herald Community Newspapers' executive editor and an adjunct professor at the Hofstra University Herbert School of Communication. Comments about this column? SBrinton@liherald.com.

LETTERS

passed, would reverse Trump's efforts to dismantle birth-control coverage. We need to protect fundamental reproductive health care.

LIZ COHEN
Albertson

'Tax reform' would hurt the middle class

To the Editor:

Last week, Republicans' "tax reform" legislation was pushed one step closer to law when the Senate passed its own tax package. Sadly, instead of helping hard-working families, the plan would grow the deficit and benefit the rich and giant corporations at the expense of everyone else.

When families sit down to do their taxes and find out they owe hundreds or thousands of dollars more, it would cause real pain. Here in New York, decreasing or eliminating state, local and property-tax deductions would hit middle-class families especially hard.

And projections show that most people making under \$75,000 a year would be worse off than they are now.

Once you take a close look at the details of this plan, it becomes clear just how much the wealthy would benefit, while the majority of families I represent would not.

It would be heartless to tell teachers that they could no longer receive a tax deduction for buying extra school supplies, or to tell new homeowners that they could no longer deduct the interest they pay on their mortgages, or to tell recent college graduates drowning in student loan debt that they could no longer deduct their loan interest.

The deductions that regular folks routinely use would be eliminated in order to help pay for a huge corporate tax cut. So let's be clear: This plan would pit the wealthiest against the rest of us — and the rich would win.

MICHAELLE SOLAGES
State assemblywoman, 22nd District

FRAMEWORK by John O'Connell



A snowy owl, blending in with sand and sky — Jones Beach