

What Not To Say

Let's say that you want to object to a proposed wind energy project, and you're given three minutes to speak to your town board (or county legislators, or a state energy panel, etc.). **What is the most effective message to get across?** *To best answer that you need to be clear about your objectives.*

Consider the following two facts: **1)** you have little hope of success unless you get a sizable number of other citizens on your side, *and* **2)** these targeted citizens [e.g. in the audience] are not a fresh slate, as they have already been propagandized by incessant messages as to why green is good, wind is free, etc.

Another way of phrasing it is that this is a **Public Relations** (PR) issue. You have a four part objective in making your comments:

- 1 - to get the majority of citizens to be sympathetic and on your side,
- 2 - to persuade any open-minded media that may be present,
- 3 - to win over any receptive representatives you are addressing, and
- 4 - to set the groundwork for a successful lawsuit.

An important matter to note is that **it is NOT your objective to adequately educate any of these people!** For one thing you are unlikely to be qualified to discuss the details of this technical matter, plus you don't have the time anyway. So let's look at three options you have, and the likely success of each.

Option #1 is to stand up and say something like "**I am against wind energy because _____**" and then you fill in the blank with (and subsequently elaborate about) some specific problem: "it kills birds" or "it devalues property" or "turbine noise harms some people" etc.

Is Option #1 a good strategy? In my view, **no it is not.**

If you carefully consider the audience's reactions you will see why this will **not** win over many people. For one thing, if I am a citizen whose property is *not* devalued (for example), my concern for someone else's problem is typically low.

For another, since citizens have been pre-programmed (falsely) to believe that there are many benefits to adopting wind energy, most will be inclined to think that these disadvantages (e.g. bird kills) are unfortunate — *but are necessary for the "greater good."*

A third problem is that you will come off as being an obstructionist. You will be painted as a denier and as a person against progress (going green). None of that will win over support from open-minded members of the audience.

A fourth deficiency in this approach is that it will be disputed. For example, the town (or whatever) will put forth some "expert" saying (for example) that the flicker effect is all psychosomatic, and not worthy of serious consideration. In a he-says/she-says confrontation, not many citizens will be won over to your side.

A fifth problem is that the town (etc.) you are speaking to may well respond that they will “mitigate” your concern. For instance, they may say that they will require the developer to have a home-buy guarantee for affected property owners. Of course, the devil is in the details, and the likelihood of any such provision being meaningful *and* legally binding, is very low. And the proposed “resolution” is being put off to another day (who knows when, if ever). But in the minds of the audience, this is a reasonable response and your concerns are now considered satisfied.

Yet a sixth problem is this: what if there is actually a legitimate solution offered for your concern? The question then becomes: once this specific matter (e.g. noise) is resolved, is wind energy then a good choice for us to add to the electric grid? *I don't think so!* The bottom line is that Option #1 has a very low chance for success regarding making converts of open-minded citizens.

Option #2 is to get up and say something like “**I support wind energy, but I object to this project because _____**” and then you again fill in the blank with (and subsequently elaborate about) some specific problem: “it kills birds” or “it devalues property” or “turbine noise harms some people” etc.

Is Option #2 a good strategy? In my view, it is markedly worse than Option #1.

Why is that? To begin with Option #2 retains five of the six liabilities of Option #1 (maybe not item 3: which is a secondary objection). In addition you have acknowledged that wind energy is a good thing for us as citizens. There is zero real scientific evidence to support that position, so what sense does it make to concede it? It's like fighting a much bigger opponent but voluntarily agreeing to have one of your arms tied behind your back. *Why would anyone do that?*

If this wasn't bad enough, going this route essentially guarantees that you will be shortly categorized as a NIMBY. The audience will hear you say “Wind is good, just not near me.” That is **not** a strategy to win them over. The bottom line is that Option #2 has an even lower chance for success.

Option #3 is to take a completely different tack. Firstly, it is a positive position — as it is a known fact that the audience will respond more favorably to positive statements. Secondly it is much broader in scope — and not really just about wind energy at all. By being broader, you will hit on concerns of almost ALL the audience, not just those few who are proximate to a wind project.

Here is what is recommended that you stand up and say (and this should be restated as often as needed, as opponents will try to move you away from this):

- 1** - We believe that we have environmental and energy issues, and
- 2** - We believe that these technical matters should be solved using real science.

Now consider the reaction of the audience. *Who can dispute either of these?*

There is NO strategy that guarantees 100% support, but this position will easily have 95% of citizens on your side. You can actually sit down after making those two simple statements — but (if you have the time) you might want to continue on to preemptively answer some likely questions.

“I’m sure that most of you agree this makes sense, but some may be asking the good question: *what is real Science?* Science is not a collection of theorems, but is a PROCESS. The core process is the Scientific Method. The Scientific Method consists of a *hypothesis* (e.g. that wind energy is equivalent to our conventional power sources), being subjected to a: **1)** comprehensive, **2)** independent [i.e. objective], **3)** transparent, and **4)** empirical based assessment. **The fact is that this has NOT been done for wind energy!”**

*This will surprise most citizens as they are likely to believe that the government would not be **mandating** stuff without thoroughly checking it out, right? Uh, wrong. You now will have more of the audience on your side here, as they can see that your request is eminently reasonable.*

You can again stop at this point, but if you have more time, keep going — you’re on a roll!

“Since we are in agreement that we have energy and environmental issues, let’s look at an example that puts this situation into perspective. Let’s say that some entrepreneurs step forward and present us with a black box that they claim holds part of a solution to these energy and environmental issues. Would we just say ‘Great, who do we make the Trillion dollar check out to?’ *I think not!* Thoughtful people would say something like: ‘Thanks for coming forward. What you say about your product sounds good. However, before we have taxpayers and ratepayers pay for this, we need to see Scientific proof that your product will be a **net societal benefit.**”

“Due to aggressive lobbyists pushing for their multi-national conglomerate clients, **none of this has been done for industrial wind energy.** Are we being unreasonable to ask for real Scientific proof that this is a net benefit?”

Presented in this way, other **citizens** can plainly see that something is amiss here. Keeping on this tack will assure you that the overwhelming majority of the audience will continue to be in agreement with your position.

Again, if you are time-limited, you can stop at this point. However, if you have another minute or so, keep forging ahead...

“You may ask: if we are going to do a scientific assessment of wind energy, exactly what is the ‘comprehensive’ part? Well, it’s fairly simple. *Any* new alternative source of energy needs to have a thorough **technical, economic, and environmental** assessment (provided by the proponents). This way we can objectively know whether this new source is at least equal to our current electricity sources. If it is not, then we should not be wasting citizens’ resources on it. To find out more about this process, go to **EnergyPresentation.Info** where an independent scientist explains it all.”

Done properly, you will have the vast majority of the audience on your side. Even if a few may quibble with a detail or two, no one can dispute the veracity of your overall thrust: *that taxpayers and ratepayers shouldn't be burdened by paying for unproven products, just because lobbyists have greased the skids.* Essentially everyone in the audience will support you on this.

Note that there is a key point made in the prior paragraph: *that it is entirely up to the proponents to provide the proof.* That's not our opinion, but is how real Science works. Be careful not to accept being put in the position where **you** have to disprove the lobbyist claims, or to come up with a "better" alternative. **The obligation is 100% on their shoulders.**

You should sit down at this point, as you have made your case. The ball will now be in the court of the town (etc.) you are speaking to.

If they say that wind energy **is** based on true Science, then say something like:

"I'm glad to hear that you are in agreement that we should **only** be supporting genuine Science-based technical solutions. Please provide us the independent, empirical report you are referring to, and we'll give you a written critique as to whether it follows the Scientific process, or not."

The significant point here is that we are not looking for *reports by scientists*, but rather *scientific reports*. BIG DIFFERENCE! You should be secure in the knowledge that no pseudo-science pro-wind report to date is based on the Scientific Method. (For example one frequent deviation is not to use empirical [real world] data but rather to use rigged computer models to "prove" their contentions. This flagrant violation of Scientific standards needs to be repeatedly identified and strenuously objected to.)

We need to build on the fact that citizens are already suspicious of lobbyists. The specific comparison that citizens need to see is that wind salespeople (**lobbyists**) **are arguing to bypass Science**. Instinctively most people will not like that, and will agree with you.

If they say that this is all about the money that the town (etc.) will get, then say:

"OK, just so we are clear here, what you seem to be saying is that it makes no difference whether or not something really works — as long as we make a few bucks on it we'll look the other way? Is that what you are really saying?"

If they say NO, then they are acknowledging that it should really work before money is spent, so proceed back:

"Good, I'm glad that we agree. No matter how much we may be getting paid — from our **own** tax and rate funds, by the way — it makes no sense to waste it on things that don't work. We want real Scientific proof before we proceed."

If they say YES, then they are acknowledging that their focus is solely on the money:

“OK, you seem to be saying that the money is the number one concern — **not** people’s health, **not** property values, **not** the killing of wildlife, **not** whether there is any benefit to us as a society. Thanks for being honest about that.

Since money is your priority, I have some contacts that would like to present you with another proposal. These people are in the billboard business and they would like to lease land in this community to put up about 50 megaboards. Some local landowners would get lease payments and the town would take in tax revenue too. There’d be several jobs created as well. By the way, these are all 300 feet high, so you’d have to tweak your sign ordinance, but since you are telling us that money is your number one objective, that should be no problem. Do I have your personal assurances that the town will do whatever it needs to do to allow these mega billboards?”

There are other examples you can come up with, but this is one that should help put this in perspective for the audience. Citizens will typically **not** want their community littered with huge billboards — *even though the community is making money on them*. Again, you should have the public on your side here.

If someone says something disparaging, take the high road and stay professional. It’s also important to have a way out for representatives who have gone on record to support wind, so that they can "save face." Switching focus to their statutory obligation often works. Their number one job is: **to protect the health, safety and welfare of their constituents**. Having a wind ordinance that does that is your objective.

The bottom line is that NO strategy will win over ALL people. This approach (if done correctly — and the devil is in the details!) is guaranteed to be the most successful strategy option available to any citizen group. The basic theme is that our energy and environmental policies should be based on **real Science**, rather than be derived from lobbyists’ inputs.

Change comes about when enough citizens object to their "representatives." There is one thing that agenda-promoting legislators simply can’t live with: *public disapproval*. It comes down to this: how important will their agenda be when they are being publicly vilified and embarrassed in its promotion? The evidence is that (in the face of such public pressure) that most of them will drop their self-serving agenda like a hot potato.

It is dismaying to hear informed and well-intentioned citizens get up at public hearings and passionately vent about a particular aspect of the wind energy issue that struck a cord with them. The fact is that these good people’s fervent words rarely get satisfactory results. The reason is that these speakers did not understand public relations. We are out-numbered, out-financed, out-maneuvered in the government and media, etc. The **ONLY** chance we have is to take the high ground. **On this issue, the high ground is Science.**

PS — If you need some additional ammo to counter the “economic” argument, consider these...

1 - "There is nothing — no program, no hobby, no vice, no crime — that does not ‘create jobs’. Hurricanes, computer viruses, and shooting convenience store clerks all ‘create jobs’. So that specious claim misses the point about why we select certain energy sources. Additionally, since it applies to all, it is a position in favor of none. Instead of an argument on the merits, it is an admission that one has no such arguments." — *Chris Horner*

2 - The US lost jobs to other countries primarily due to economics: specifically, low cost labor. We have one major economic benefit left to counter more job loss: low cost electricity. Giving up this substantial advantage would guarantee that we will have many more job losses. *Why would we voluntarily to this???*

3 - The history of the planet since the turn of the 20th century has been one of the greatest increase in overall human well-being that has ever been seen. Over a year ago the world passed the point where the majority of the people on the planet could be classified as “middle class” (middle class being defined as those who have sufficient income beyond subsistence needs to allow significant discretionary spending). The prime driver of that trend has been the expanding availability of economical and reliable energy, particularly in China and India. Why would we revert to unreliable, uneconomical 19th century technology?

PPS — “How to use this document”

Before you go to a hearing or a public meeting, take the indented portions of text in Option #3 (plus other pertinent sections) and transfer them to a series of 3 x 5 index cards.

Add any personalization you feel may be beneficial (i.e. details that relate to your specific situation). Having this information in your hand will give you confidence as you speak. If you are not accustomed to addressing a public forum it can be an intimidating experience — *but does not need to be!* This suggestion, and the information above are designed to help you be as successful as possible.

PPPS — If all else fails...

In the most intransigent cases, a lawsuit may be called for. If you do decide to go that way, make sure that you have an **aggressive** attorney who is willing to pull out all the stops. See this [document](#) for sample information on some of your legal options. In the US, **a Federal “1983” statute claim is extraordinarily powerful**. Carefully going through the public contact process from the scientific perspective sets the stage for a subsequent lawsuit — which would have a higher degree of success due to the solid foundation built.