

What Not To Say

Let's say that you want to object to some 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 way to get your message across? To best answer that you need to be clear about your objectives.

Consider the following two facts: **1)** that you have little hope of success unless you get a sizable number of other citizens on your side, *and* **2)** that these 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** matter. In my view 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 bats and 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 to believe that there are many benefits to adopting wind energy, most will be inclined to think that these disadvantages (e.g. bird and bat kills) are unfortunate, but 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 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 that the developer 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 bats and 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 it isn't really just about wind energy at all. By being broader, you will address concerns of almost ALL the audience, not just those few who are proximate to a wind project.

Here is what I am recommending 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 pre-emptively 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)** objective, **3)** independent, **4)** transparent, and **5)** empirical based assessment. **The fact is that this has NOT been done for wind energy!”**

*This will surprise most citizens as they are likely of the opinion that the government wouldn’t be **mandating** stuff on us 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 the Scientific Method proof that your product will be an effective cost-benefit solution.’”

“Due to aggressive lobbyists pushing for their multi-national conglomerate clients, **none of this has been done for wind energy.** I ask you am I being unreasonable to ask for genuine scientific proof?”

Presented in this way, **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 going...

“You may ask: exactly what needs to be proven? 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 sources of power, or not. If they are not, then we should not be wasting citizens’ resources on them. To find out more about this process, go to **EnergyPresentation.Info** where an independent scientist explains it all.”

Done properly, you will still have the vast majority of the audience on your side. Even if a few may quibble with a detail or so, 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 this last 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. **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 science-based technical solutions. Give me the independent, objective report you are referring to, and I'll give you a written critique as to whether it is based on the Scientific Method 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 (that I am aware of) is based on the Scientific Method. (For example one frequent deviation is not to use empirical 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 lobbyists are replacing 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 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 whether there is any benefit to us as a society, etc. Thanks for being honest about that... In that case, 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 me that money is your number one objective, that should be no problem. Do I have your 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 some money is being made. Again, you should have them on your side here.

The bottom line is that NO strategy will win over ALL people. This approach (if done correctly) is guaranteed to be the most successful strategy option available to any citizens 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 **will** come about when enough citizens object to their "representatives." That is one thing that these agenda promoters 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? My experience says that (in the face of such public pressure) that most of them will drop their self-serving agenda like a hot potato.

If someone says something disparaging, take the high road and stay professional. It’s also important to have a way out for these people so that they can "save face." My proposed "Alternative Plan" is such an idea (see [EnergyPresentation.Info](#)).

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 <<<http://tinyurl.com/2bkuxh5>>> for sample information. 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.

Carefully study **EnergyPresentation.Info** to be prepared for any other questions.