

## Region needs affordable energy

*CARL GUSTIN As you were saying ...*

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Kumi Naidoo, then executive director of Greenpeace, said following the international climate change deal in Paris last month, “We will push our beautifully simple solution to climate change – 100 percent renewable energy for all – and make sure it is heard and embraced.”

His statement, beautiful in its simplicity, might be viewed as stunning in its naivete and even dangerous in its consequences. Greenpeace is not the only environmental organization that believes abandoning fossil fuels is necessary to save future generations from a worldwide environmental catastrophe.

For many of them, the collapse of energy prices, in part resulting from abundant U.S. supplies of natural gas and oil, is an unwelcome development. Looked at another way, however, this new abundance “can not only help restore U.S. competitiveness, but can also create geopolitical advantages for America ... while substantially mitigating local environmental impacts and speeding up the transition to a cleaner future that is both practical and affordable.”

That’s a conclusion reached by Michael Porter and a team from the Harvard Business School and the Boston Consulting Group in a report last year on “America’s Unconventional Energy Opportunity.” It outlines an all-resource strategy built around America’s unconventional but abundant oil and natural gas resources.

It is consistent with findings in a report prepared last year for the New England Coalition for Affordable Energy by a team headed by Daymark Energy Advisors in Boston that found a mix of new natural gas pipelines, wind energy and electric transmission lines could mitigate or eliminate \$5.4 billion in higher prices New England consumers and businesses will have to pay if no new energy infrastructure is built in the region by 2020.

Unfortunately, virtually all infrastructure projects in New England, from pipelines to transmission lines and even wind projects, face strong opposition.

Energy transitions do not happen quickly and can be heavily influenced by unforeseen events. President Jimmy Carter came to office in 1977 and his administration immediately began to tackle energy as a top priority. Three months after taking office, Carter set out national energy goals, one of which was to have “solar energy in more than 2.5 million homes by 1985.” By 2013, 36 years after the Carter goal was announced, there were just 400,000 homes powered by solar.

This is not to suggest that solar and renewables should not, or cannot, play a major role in meeting future energy needs, only that abundant supplies of domestic natural gas and oil — supplies not anticipated during the Carter years — will continue to power the U.S. economy for the foreseeable future.

For New England businesses and consumers, a reliable 24/7 supply of affordable energy is vital. Intermittent renewable resources will not meet that requirement without the support of a robust energy infrastructure to move electricity and the fuels that produce it. Balancing and integrating fossil fuel use with renewable resources is a good thing, not just for businesses and consumers economically, but for the environment as well.

An important step in that direction is to make sure New England has the energy infrastructure it needs to keep prices affordable and supplies reliable. That means removing physical and regulatory constraints that limit delivery of low-cost natural gas from the west, hydropower from Canada, and wind energy from remote areas of New England.

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