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Editorial: Don't be shortsighted on renewable energy

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Latest up: A state senator wants to effectively outlaw solar and wind power in the state.

Under a bill filed by Sen. Bill Cook of Beaufort County, wind and solar farms would have to be located at least a mile and a half from the nearest property line.

Cook's Senate Bill 843 further requires that solar panels would have to be concealed behind a perimeter of hedges and native landscaping. Wind turbines would have to generate no more than 35 decibels of noise, as measured from the nearest property line the equivalent, according to experts, of two humans whispering.

Spokesmen for the wind and solar industry note that no existing wind farm or solar farm could meet these requirements. No facility could be built to these specification and still be economically practicable. The effect, then, is to outlaw any further wind and solar farms in North Carolina.

Environmentalists noted wryly that the bill sets far tougher standards than the state requires of coal-fueled power plants and nuclear reactors. By comparison, state law requires hog-waste lagoons and hazardous waste landfills to be set back just 200 feet from the nearest property line.

But, hey, stand out in the sun too long and you can get cancer. That stuff is REALLY dangerous.

As we've said before, our nation needs a balanced diet of energy resources, and wind and solar power need to be part of that mix.

Compared to other sources — say, coal-burning — they generate almost no pollutants. They don't answer all of America's needs, but they can help reduce our dependence on hydrocarbons imported from unstable trouble spots around the globe and set the stage for more use in the future. It just makes sense.

A faction of our legislators, though, seem to think that solar and wind power are inherently bad. Some of them keep trying to repeal North Carolina's Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard, which requires a minimum percentage of electric power be generated by renewable sources.,

That standard, set in 2007, has helped make North Carolina third in the nation in terms of solar power generated. It builds jobs. It is, in short, A Good Thing.

These bizarre attacks on renewable energy make it hard to be skeptical of the folks who feel some legislators are doing the bidding of the fossil-fuel industries. That's certainly their right, but we'd like some details.

The good news is that Senate Bill 843 has supposedly been assigned to what's normally a slow-track committee. The bill has been getting bad reviews in the state House, which is supposed to be closer to the people. Landowners who get revenue from solar farms off low-performing real estate have apparently been calling in.

Nevertheless, the bill is still out there and poses a threat while the legislature remains in session. To paraphrase that noted Tar Heel sage Deputy Barney Fife, the only thing to do is to nip it. Nip it in the bud.

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