

## Old Country Lawyer, May 2010 Silver Buckshot and Institutional Green

With awe and humility, I have the opportunity to participate in meetings of the Kent Environmental Council and sit at the same table with men and women who changed the language, the legislation, and the economy of the United States. Men and women with academic credentials in geology and biology and the other disciplines of life on this planet, who could have made fortunes as consultants defending the short-term profits of industries who wanted no restrictions on using America's land and rivers as their garbage dumps, instead had put on their boots and gloves and personally pulled trash out of the Cuyahoga River and picked up recycle bins on the streets of Kent.

In 2010, this seems like a commendable but not remarkable activity. This is the measure of how much change the Founding Parents of the Kent Environmental Council have wrought. Forty years ago, when this was done for the first time, it was Earth-shaking. In 1970, the industries who saw their free waste disposal going away, did their best to deceive Americans into believing Green was Red. Individuals who brought about rules to require industries to repair the damage they had done to the public land and water, were called unpatriotic and were accused of trying to wreck the American economy, exactly as the individuals who today are trying to bring about rules to require industries to pay for the damage they do to the public atmosphere.

One of those Founding Parents told me a few days ago, "Longevity has its advantages." Forty years have seen many of the Founders pass on, but those who are still active in the defense of the planet see some of the results of their revolutionary actions of 1970 - most Americans no longer believe it is normal to dump untreated chemicals into the Cuyahoga, tens of thousands of Ohioans swim in Lake Erie without requiring tetanus shots, most folks drop aluminum beer cans into recycle bins rather than tossing them to the road, even at College Fest.

Some guidance we take from this history is that, for the defense of the planet, there is not a single silver bullet, but there are many pellets of silver buckshot. The conduct that Americans view as acceptable, or commendable, or even fashionable, changes over time, and changes bit by bit, pellet by pellet.

The conduct to be targeted now should be energy consumption and generation. The paradigm should be changed from a system of centralized commercial generation and distribution through a grid to the consumer, into dispersed generation, particularly generation on site at the point of consumption. This change will disrupt economic interests that for the past century have had great influence on federal policy.

Utility interests attempt to Institutionalize Green by proposing the construction of gigantic wind farms, in Lake Erie or on the Great Plains, which would produce gigawatts of energy to feed into grids to be constructed to distribute that energy to consumers, thereby generating profit for the utility companies. Such generation is unquestionably an improvement over coal-fired generation. Therefore, the utility interests declare the necessity of taxpayer subsidies to construct Institutional Green centralized generating facilities and new gridwork to distribute the electricity to consumers.

At the same time, the same utility interests lobby local zoning authorities to restrict the construction of modest wind generators proposed to be sited on top office buildings or apartment buildings or in industrial yards. On-site generators of electricity to be consumed at the point of generation without flowing through The Grid reduce the cost to the consumer by eliminating both the actual cost of transmission and the profit of the utility company. Utility lobbyists have argued to Cleveland City Council that wind generators are safety hazards or are unsightly or have whatever other undesirable characteristic might make them sufficiently reprehensible so that the wind resources of the Lakeside Avenue bluff overlooking Browns Stadium and the Cleveland harbour should not be used to generate electricity in competition with the coal and nuclear plants of AEP.

Other utility interests attempt to Institutionalize Green by proposing to grade off the surface of wilderness areas in the Mojave Desert and cover the ground with photovoltaic panels to meet California's requirement that some portion of electricity be generated by "renewable" means. An inquiry might be made as to how renewable the wilderness might be after having been roofed in silicon.

The threat is damage to the atmosphere from centralized electric power generation, causing health risks and climate change. The most effective responses to that threat are not massive Institutional Green projects that perpetuate The Grid. The effective responses are reduction of use of The Grid, pellet by pellet, by reducing on-site consumption twenty percent through insulation and device efficiency, by installing solar shingles or photovoltaic roof panels to provide on-site twenty percent of the remaining demand for electricity consumption, and by installing a small wind generator to provide another on-site twenty percent of the remaining demand for electricity consumption, so as to reduce the demand on centrally-produced power by sixty percent.

Forty years ago the Founding Parents showed the way, individual action leading to legislative action leading to generations of Americans who grow up believing that it is inherently right to preserve the planet rather than abuse it. We hope we have another forty years to continue that process so coming generations will have a planet to preserve.

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