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JANUARY 20TH, 2016
STATEMENT BEFORE VERMONT STATE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
REGARDING CITIZENS CONCERNS FROM THE TOWN OF IRASBURG, VT.

Renewable energy projects are at a frantic pace. The expected deployment of some of these initiatives has citizens of this state and, in particular, the Town of Irasburg alarmed.

The Town of Irasburg, in the Northeast Kingdom, is threatened with the proposed construction of two five-hundred-foot wind turbines on the most prominent ridgeline overlooking our town.

It has become increasingly evident that the Northeast Kingdom has tremendous appeal to renewable energy development. Its majestic mountains and open spaces have always been appealing to travelers and tourists far and wide for decades. However, our concern lies in the vulnerability of some of Vermont's poorest communities' and their ability to resist the power these project promoters may bring and the potential depreciation they may leave behind.

The Northeast Kingdom is ^{not} ~~not~~ an exporter of renewable energy. Our power grids are full and cannot accept any more electricity. Yet towns like Irasburg are still being targeted by industrial wind developers because we are rural and lack the economic resources to defend ourselves.

On October 1, 2015, the citizens of Irasburg voted 274 to 9—ninety-seven percent-- not to allow the use of ridge lines in our town for development by industrial wind turbine projects. Since the construction of the Sheffield and Lowell Mountain projects (over thirty turbines visible for miles), more than 75 towns in Vermont have voiced their opposition to the siting process for renewable energy projects, either by vote, by town plan, or by resolution. We are pleading for the legislators in Montpelier to pay attention to what the citizens of these towns are saying and make legislative changes to give towns more say in decisions that vitally affect their citizens and their future. There needs to be a balance between the public good that is renewable energy production and the public good that is represented by land use and other priorities at the local level.

The huge scale and dominant location of two 500-foot industrial wind turbines on Irasburg's Kidder Hill Ridge would cause substantial harm to the character and well-being of our town. They would degrade our landscape, reduce our property values, destroy forest land. Time will tell of the threat to our citizens' health, and damage wildlife habitat—all without providing any benefit to our town in lowered electricity costs or improvement to the environment. We are today reminding our legislators of the common sense Vermont way! Allow the communities of this grand state to best determine smartly-sited renewables.

There is no meaningful way for citizens and municipalities, including the citizens and elected officials of Irasburg, to have a voice in the Public Service Board process for

siting and approving energy projects. Wind developers have deep pockets and experienced teams of attorneys to advocate for them. To have any kind of voice in the process, small rural towns are forced to try to come up with many tens of thousands of dollars that they don't have, in order to pay legal fees for specialized attorneys to represent their interests before the PSB. The legislature should take action so that towns are not forced into this unfair position or practice.

Future renewable energy projects in Vermont should go forward only with community participation from the outset, and only on a scale and in a manner that preserves Vermont's working landscape and directly benefits local communities. In the end all of Vermont will benefit.

Brian F. Fecher
Select Board Chair
Town of Irasburg
Citizen of Vermont