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### The power of long-term energy agreements

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I would like to respond to the article "Potential wind-power bill draws mixed reactions" published Dec. 30. It concerned the coming legislative session and a bill, which will require the Public Service Commission to direct public utilities to enter into long-term contracts for offshore wind power. I understand that some elected officials and ratepayers are concerned at the possible rate increases such a bill might cause.

As a ratepayer experiencing the dramatic increase in energy costs that have occurred over the past 10 years, I, too, would prefer to avoid similar increases. In the past, we have looked at short-term energy costs that have led to enormous increases in our energy bills (and other products).

For most of my working career, I was in the technology field, where I found that the cost of the products I sold continued to come down year after year. I believe that over time the cost of wind power will decrease as well, as the technology improves, while the cost of other forms of energy will increase.

Just consider how much you paid per byte for a hard drive 10 years ago and how much you pay today. Also, when flat-screen televisions were introduced the cost was astronomical, now they are very affordable. These are just two examples of cost reduction that occurs and the same is already happening with wind turbines.

Just a few years ago the average wind turbine produced 1.5 MW of power. New turbines are producing 3 MW of power each and some firms are designing 5 MW and 10 MW turbines. This increase in power per turbine will help drive down the cost of wind power. Also, the Mid-Atlantic Wind Connection (Google's proposed transmission lines in the Atlantic Ocean) will enable wind farms to connect into the grid at far less cost than would be the case if each wind farm had to connect to bring its transmission lines on to shore individually.

In addition, wind power has the potential to provide much-needed jobs to our weak economy as indicated in the governor's press release on Oct. 7, 2010:--

"Governor O'Malley today joined members of the United Steelworkers, along with representatives from the clean energy, manufacturing, and non-profit sectors, to announce the tremendous potential that offshore wind development holds for new job creation in Maryland. A proposed one gigawatt wind farm in the waters off of the Delmarva coast could generate as many as 4,000 manufacturing and construction jobs during the five year development period, with an additional 800 permanent jobs once the turbines are spinning, while securing our energy future and producing sustainable energy solutions for consumers."

Most of our energy today is from old coal-fired plants where all their capital costs were expensed many years ago, and thus their current costs are based on fuel costs and market conditions. New wind farms will require considerable capital investment at a time of economic uncertainty. The purpose of new legislation would be to look at the long-term cost of energy instead of the cost today. Would you purchase the cheapest car today, knowing that it would require high maintenance costs and need to be replaced sooner than a car costing slightly more?

I ask our elected officials to please keep an open mind in determining their position for long-term energy legislation and to become informed as to the true long-term cost for all forms of energy. We, as a country, need to become energy independent -- and wind power will surely be an important component in achieving this goal.

Doug Kaplan is president

of Sugarloaf Conservancy.

He lives near Urbana.

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