

MINNESOTA'S ENERGY PLAN IS MAKING ME TIRED!  
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During last year's Legislative Session, the Minnesota House Energy Committee passed bills that **mandate** the major electric power utilities (Xcel, Allete, Otter Tail Power, and Great River Energy) adopt an operating strategy that will result (by 2020) in at least 25% of their power output flowing from renewable, 'green', non-fossil fuels. The bills also require that Xcel actually reduce the amount of power it sells during that same time period through energy conservation programs. The female House member (former elementary school teacher) who chairs the Energy Committee triumphantly advised the press, "We extracted these concessions from Xcel in exchange for granting them continued 'permission' to store spent nuclear fuel rods at their two nuclear plants".

The press never questioned this pronouncement, just reported it verbatim. What little Miss Goody Two-Shoes doesn't seem to understand is as follows:

1. It takes about **12 years** to design, build, start-up and license a new coal fired power plant.
2. It takes about **15 years** to do the same for a new nuclear plant.
3. All Minnesota power users have (for more than 25 years) been paying a special tax on their monthly electric bills to fund construction of a central Federal Storage Depot at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. More than \$370 Million has flowed from Minnesota rate-payers to Washington. Yucca Mountain's underground tunnels are virtually complete, but there are 12 lawsuits to prevent its start-up and operation. Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nevada) and President Obama now advise that Yucca will "**Never go into operation**". Hundreds of millions of US taxpayers have paid more than \$13 Billion for the DOE's "Hole-in-the-Ground". Without it, spent uranium fuel rods will have to stay right where they are, in steel casks at all 121 power plant sites, nationwide. A group of utilities are suing the Federal Government to return the monies collected, but it's likely that some Federal District Court Judge will eventually rule that 'the money only flows one way' (ie, shove your fuel rods up your asses).
4. Executives at Xcel aren't necessarily the brightest bulbs in the chandelier, but they realize that in the interest of "peace in our time" they can **agree to anything** the kooky state legislature dreams up, no matter how far fetched. If the legislature tried to actually revoke the storage permits, the result would be a complete plant shutdown. So the practical reality is that with each new year, the earliest possible closure of an exiting nuclear plant moves either 12 or 15 years out into the future, unless you want power blackouts every summer. Xcel and Allete use contracts to buy standby (peaking load) power from 3 Canadian Provincial Hydro Authorities, but its very expensive per kwhr compared to the blended cost rate of Minnesota generated power from coal, nuclear, natural gas, and wind. Plus, summer comes to Canada and Minnesota at the same time, and Canadians in Alberta, Ontario and Manitoba aren't going to turn off their air conditioners just so we can turn ours on. So Miss Goody's veiled threats are like headcheese, **they're 90% baloney**. She can say it, but she can't do it, at least if she (and her party) wants to be re-elected for another term.
5. Xcel is legislatively "tasked" (God, I love these new verbs) to conserve energy, and they are implementing a number of sensible programs like 'smart meters', interruptible power pricing, consumer rebates for newer, efficient home appliances, energy audits, etc.

But A) all the while people (consumers) are buying the largest (54"+) flat screen TVs (from Japan and Korea) that they can afford. Local Fortune 500 company Best Buy's bottom line is absolutely dependent on selling more and more of these power thirsty monstrosities. The new Twins Stadium features a gigantic live screen display that will literally make "the lights go out in Georgia" (or at least in Blaine) every time some steroid crazed bozo hits a home run. And why not? Every other major city's stadium has one, and 'we're big league', so we have to have one too!

B) Everybody wants faster computers with more video and Internet capability (Google, Facebook, You-Tube, etc). However by 2013 the amount of electric power consumed to run the Internet in (just) the United States will equal the total power consumed by the country of Australia! Warehouses full of servers on our west coast, home and office computers "on" 24/7. All of this takes power, not thin air!

But the coup-de-grace on all this phony conservation hubris is the much-anticipated arrival of ELECTRIC (as in 'plug-in') CARS. Assuming GM gets two more Federal bailouts, the Chevrolet Volt will debut late in 2011. The amount of **additional electric power** required if consumers actually adopt (or are Federally forced to adopt) electric cars is a sea-change upward from current power consumption levels. So if electric cars are a 'good thing' (petroleum independence, global warming, etc), then Xcel's commitments to flat or declining power sales will fall by the wayside like a wormy apple off teacher Goody's desk. And the baloney/headcheese ratio will climb to 100%!

But what the hell, I remember my kindergarten teacher used to tell us neat stories just before we unrolled our rugs for a nap. So if today's schoolteacher wants to tell the voters stories, why not let her do it? Just make sure the air conditioner is turned on full, so I don't sweat all over my nap rug.