

3/16/21

Chairs and members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee,

I'm Doug Bowen and I'm speaking in opposition to LD 597. First claiming a year ago that biomass/CHP energy is "carbon neutral", then that it's "carbon friendly" then that it's "low carbon," the Wood Products Industry now asserts it emits "less carbon than oil." In fact, we don't know how much CO2 it emits. I ask this committee to find out before making any decisions.

Even if biomass energy hypothetically emits CO2 at levels similar, say, to natural gas, why would we assist it to get even bigger than the nearly one sixth of Maine's annual timber harvest already consumed by it. If passed, that proportion could easily increase to the point that state-sponsored efforts to sequester more forest carbon would fail. That so much harvested forest goes to biomass energy belies industry assertions that mostly its waste that gets burned.

Industry claims CHP will lower energy costs. But its history in Maine, in NH at the Burgess CHP plant, across Europe, and wherever it exists, shows that CHP is expensive energy. It's repeatedly proven unable to stand on its own, requiring on-going tax-payer subsidies to survive. CHP won't lower energy costs. U Maine climate scientist Dr Ivan Fernandez questions whether biomass/CHP can ever be cost effective when compared to inexpensive innovations like heat pumps. Beware the risk that initial assistance would once again turn into permanent subsidies.

The Industry touts the renewability of biomass/CHP energy. But this is not renewability where it counts. At least thirty years are needed before trees cut down for CHP are regrown by trees that can even begin to sequester carbon; much longer for trees to store it in bulk. In the meantime, CHP is reducing forest carbon sequestration even as it's increasing CO2 emissions.

The Industry needs to quit looking backwards for more low-value solutions to its chronic financial problems. Its opportunities lie forward by producing higher-value durable wood products such as CLT, wood-based insulation and many other innovations that can utilize small trees, thereby responding to 21st century demand. That's where state-private investment is needed today to ensure that Maine is on top, not only in research, but in production and providing good jobs.

Thank You,

Doug Bowen

Porter, ME