

## EDITORIAL

## Nothing like the sun

An interesting solar energy forum took place at the White Mountain School in Bethlehem last Wednesday. From just a few people with solar panels 35 years ago, the idea of producing electricity with sunlight has gone mainstream. In the vanguard like usual, White Mountain School is set to install 45 kilowatts of solar panels on the roof of its new arts center.

Thanks to the Ammonoosuc Regional Energy Team for organizing this year's forum. Last year, the team offered a similar morning of interesting information that discussed biomass energy and heating.

Solar power technologies range from hot water heating at a single residence to long arrays of solar electric panels spread across several acres. One of the main drawbacks to solar energy has been the long payback time on the upfront investment. Rising electricity rates, government incentives, and technological improvements are now making solar more attractive for homeowners and businesses. Although New England is far from the sunniest place in the country, our high electricity rates make any alternative to the traditional power grid look better.

The solar industry has faced opposition from those who question the federal government's loan program to promote renewable energy projects. The failure of Solyndra, which received a loan of more than \$500 million that could not be paid back to the federal government, provided fodder for those who question the government's drive to give a boost to solar companies.

Fair enough. The government's rush to do something usually develops kinks, whether expanding the solar industry or invading countries with large oil supplies.

Opponents of solar installation incentives have said such policies mean the government picks winners and losers in the marketplace. Maybe if the new Congress ends all solar tax credits they will remember to cut off the tens of billions of dollars oil and gas companies receive in corporate welfare each year. Fossil fuel tax breaks help the most profitable industry in the country fund an army of lobbyists intent on making sure big oil wins the war for the government's ear and the public's wallets.

Regardless of the wisdom of what the government does to promote certain energy industries, science does not lie. No matter the acreage of forests in Quebec flooded to produce hydropower, the number of nuclear plants generating toxic waste, or the amount of coal, oil, and natural gas pulled from the earth, the human race will never have a greater source of energy than the sun. Harnessing the shiny yellow orb that won't be going away for a few billion years has a logic that seems compelling, even during a really long winter when the sun becomes a rare visitor.

Any discussion of North Country energy makes one think of Northern Pass. Perhaps leaders of that project could have pointed the way forward by spending \$35 million on solar panels rather than land purchases in Coös County to find a place for their monstrous towers. Oh, well. Try as they might, Northern Pass can't stop the sun from rising tomorrow.