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Dubie and Shumlin

## Shumlin, Dubie share similar platform on wind

By [Peter Hirschfeld](#)

Vermont Press Bureau

Two years ago, the contrast between the Republican and Democratic candidates for governor on the issue of large-scale wind power was clear.

As Gov. James Douglas reiterated his longstanding opposition to the "commercialization and industrialization" of Vermont's ridge tops, his Democratic opponent, Gaye Symington, touted an aggressive pro-wind platform that would see turbines providing 20 percent of the state's electricity needs by 2018.

"It is time for Jim Douglas to stop tilting at windmills and let me build them instead," Symington said at a 2008 campaign event in Hinesburg.

This year, distinguishing between the major-party candidates' views on wind power isn't so easy. Both Republican Brian Dubie and Democrat Peter Shumlin have long championed utility-scale wind generation as a key component in Vermont's energy future. Dubie's stance on the issue, in fact, has been one of the more notable differences between him and Douglas.

As proposals to put up turbines divide towns across the state, however, both Dubie and Shumlin have adopted stances that try to underscore their support for wind power without alienating fierce anti-wind contingents in communities targeted by developers.

At a recent debate in Tunbridge, for instance, Dubie stepped back some from his advocacy.

"I do support wind power, but I've got to tell you, in this campaign I have received a lot of strong feedback all across the state and it's not as simple as supporting wind power," Dubie said. "My sympathies are starting to go to communities who say the state needs to assist communities about where wind power should be appropriately sited."

Shumlin says the "moral imperative" to aggressively adopt renewable energy in Vermont demands an increase in the number of utility-scale wind projects. But he says Vermont must weigh the benefits of wind power against the concerns of communities in which projects are proposed.

"Let's ensure that no wind project is built unless the local community votes to have it," Shumlin has said.

Chilly reception

Wind developers have had only limited success getting permission to build projects in Vermont, due in large part to opposition from well-organized opponents, who cite turbines' alleged impacts on bats, birds and wildlife habitats. Some groups also say the sound created by turbine blades is harmful to human health.

Currently, Green Mountain Power operates the state's lone large-scale wind project, in Searsburg. The Public Service Board, the three-person, governor-appointed body responsible for approving wind projects, has given its OK to a project in Sheffield and additional turbines in Searsburg and Readsboro. Voters in Lowell this year approved a wind proposal from Green Mountain Power that would include the installation of about 20 turbines.

Other proposals remain in the exploratory stage, including one from the Boston-based energy company Citizens Wind, which has eyed the Northfield Ridge in Waitsfield as a possible site for wind development. Mountain ridges in the towns of Ira, East Haven and Georgia also have drawn the interest of energy companies.

Both proponents and detractors of wind power in Vermont say the next governor could have a strong hand in the fate of those proposals.

Lawrence Mott, chairman of the trade group Renewable Energy Vermont and principal of New Generation Partners, a renewable-energy developer headquartered in Bristol, said a sweeping vision from the state's top elected official could provide the capital investments and political will needed to spur growth.

"As long as a government provides a vision with a clear plan, then private business will come in," Mott said. "The No. 1 thing for private businesses ... is they want predictability. So we must create predictability."

More local clout?

Ben Luce, a Lyndon State College physics and sustainability instructor who opposes any large-scale wind development in Vermont, says reforming the state regulatory process could arm communities with the influence they need to thwart ridge-top development.

Act 248, the law under which energy projects are evaluated, lacks the safeguards municipalities should have against unwanted intrusion by wind developers, says Luce. He spoke in Waitsfield on Wednesday at an event hosted by Friends of the Northfield Ridge, a group opposed to wind development in the Mad River Valley.

"The regulatory process makes it very hard to stop projects. It doesn't provide any real say for communities," Luce said. "The kinds of considerations the citizenry like to consider are pretty much taken out from the outset. It's not about whether they do the project, but how."

Luce suggested replacing the Public Service Board with a "larger, elected citizens board."

Dubie says wind projects should be contingent on the support of communities affected by them. He proposes giving veto power not only to towns where turbines would be placed, but

also to nearby municipalities in which residents would be able to see them.

"If the community takes a vote and says we don't think it's appropriate, then I certainly think we should be deferring to the local community," Dubie said Thursday.

Mott supports vesting more power in local communities, which he says won't necessarily impede development. As long as Vermont's next governor uses his "bully pulpit ... to set goals and clear directives at the agency level," Vermont can move forward on a democratic path to wind development, Mott said.

"I think by setting those goals, we could foster more projects for review, which would give Vermonters a chance to say 'yes' or 'no' and pick and choose good projects," Mott said.

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