

Energy Independence 101

Question: How does Puerto Rico become more energy independent?

- A. Build more petroleum burning power plants.
- B. Buy power from other countries.
- C. Pursue alternative energy sources.

This is not a trick question. Almost every 6th grader would answer this question correctly. Why can't PREPA? Because it is NOT a priority for them.

Why is alternative energy the last choice of the bureaucrats? Why not let private businesses establish alternate energy sources and have PREPA buy the power from them at similar prices? Why go to Columbia instead of letting us, Puerto Ricans, create the generators, collectors, and profits? Why send our monthly checks to Columbia while we could keep the funds locally?

Whatever the scale, whether residential roof mounted photovoltaics using net metering to power the local grid, or wind farms to power the islands, the benefits are numerous, and the right choice is clear. We have abundant wind and solar resources. We have excellent potential sites for locating the large scale projects. We have world class engineers. We have numerous global examples of success to guide us. We have the cost incentive of having the highest priced electricity in the States.

All that we need to do is receive permission to try. Currently, only PREPA can grant that permission, and they won't even allow net metering, a simple first step. PREPA controls the grid and access to it at our peril. If PREPA is not going to lead, at least they should get out of the way.

Columbian power may be a cost effective way to diversify and spread some risks of power interruption, but it won't be a panacea. First, it's Columbia, not Puerto Rico. Second, it doesn't reduce carbon emissions one iota: Every kilowatt of power exported requires more than a kilowatt to be generated due to losses. Only 75% of Columbia's power is hydroelectric, the other 25% is petroleum. Every kilowatt they export is a kilowatt they can't use domestically, so the thermal power plants keep on chugging. Third, Columbia has had a checkered history of power interruptions due to system sabotage and droughts at the hydroelectric sources. Doesn't it make sense to develop our own alternative sources first?

We wish to enhance our economic attractiveness for high tech businesses on the island. We seek knowledge based enterprise growth as the key to our future. At the same time we have a power industry that is living in the 1950's. Who thinks prospective global businesses don't notice?

Anyone believing PREPA is doing a good job for us now and is providing well for our future probably didn't answer "C".