

The 'go fly a kite' energy bill

Legislation, moving through Virginia's General Assembly and weighted heavily in favor of corporate interests, tells NIMBYs to MYOB.

An energy bill moving through Virginia's General Assembly would silence future critics. If it gains passage, the state, in collusion with energy companies, can run roughshod over localities' concerns and ram nuclear power plants and the like onto any land it sees fit.

The bill would knock the wind out of Not In My Back Yard protests.

If the State Corporation Commission decides a particular parcel of land is well-suited for, say, windmills or a nuclear plant or liquefied natural gas storage, and a company wants to build it, then it's not the locality's business to stand in the way.

The bill would strip from localities the usual tools of land-use plans and zoning that are used to determine whether projects fit with what communities want.

The provision is part of a mega energy policy bill proposed by Sen. Frank W. Wagner, R Virginia Beach, that seeks to increase the commonwealth's energy independence. In trying to be all things to all tentacles of the energy industry, the bill would allow off-coast drilling along Virginia's shore despite what anyone living there has to say.

It also would allow the state to site a controversial liquefied natural gas port, even if no community wished to host such a dangerous venture.

The bill would basically tell people, especially those who in the past objected to the siting of natural gas transmission lines and windmills, to go fly a kite.

Granted, NIMBYs' interests are generally parochial, confined to their neighborhoods and void of seeing the entire picture, but they shouldn't be barred from the public debate. Sometimes they raise valid concerns that only they are able to see by virtue of being so close to the affected land. And sometimes those concerns can be mitigated and allow for a neighborly compromise.

Wagner's bill, as written, ignores that process and the concerns of families who worry about their children playing near transmission lines or who are going to have to fall asleep listening to the sounds of a windmill farm.

The bill doesn't differentiate between communities that would welcome energy facilities and ones that would not. The state and energy companies would decide, and the rest of Virginia would meekly comply.

Virginians had better speak up now about the provisions in the proposed energy bill, because if it passes, they will be forced to hold their peace.