

Roth: Congress ends wind energy credits

On Jan. 1, subsidies for U.S. wind energy ended with Congress refusing to renew them. Perhaps they are among the many victims of an inactive Congress. It was recently rated perhaps the least-working Congress in history.

Either way, wind tax incentive aid enabled renewable-power suppliers to build clean energy across many areas of Oklahoma and in turn has made cheaper power available to Oklahoma families.

In fact, wind projects installed in Oklahoma in 2013 were actually able to bid 20-year leveled energy at prices far below the delivered cost of coal, which has usually been cheapest – at least until you add in the costs to remove coal's many pollutants.

In one way or another, the U.S. has subsidized wind-sourced electricity since 1992 to promote the use of cleaner energy and lessen America's dependence on the fossil fuels blamed for climate change.

Last year, billions of dollars in wind production tax credits, or PTCs, amounted to ratepayers saving 2.3 cents per kilowatt-hour, or kWh, of electricity.

Coal still leads the percentage of American electricity at 37 percent; natural gas provides 30 percent. Nuclear power provides 19 percent, with renewable energies growing to account for the rest.

More than 13 gigawatts of new wind power capacity was added last year to the U.S. grid, bringing the total to more than 60 GW, with the capacity to power more than 15 million homes each year.

An estimated 72 percent of wind turbine parts for U.S. wind farms are manufactured domestically. According to recent study by Environmental Entrepreneurs, more than 186,500 clean energy and clean transportation jobs have been announced across the country in the past two years alone.

Wind energy is now, on average, the second-cheapest U.S. energy source.

According to the Department of Energy, the average cost of natural gas from a new plant in 2018 will be 6.7 cents per kWh, compared with 8.7 cents for wind, 10 cents for coal and 11 cents for nuclear power.

Energy from offshore wind farms remains at 22 cents per kWh.

The end of the tax credit or Congress' inability to act does not put an end to this growing industry. Wind operators whose construction began before Dec. 31, 2013, may continue to earn the federal benefit for 10 years, with only new projects being subsidy-free.

Currently 29 states have set their own renewable-energy goals thereby encouraging operators to invest in wind.

By 2020, California is expected to produce a third of its electricity from renewable sources, while Maine has a goal of 40-percent renewable energy by 2017.

According to the American Wind Energy Association, technological advances have helped drive down wind production costs by more than 40 percent in the last four years and these improvements will continue to drive down costs.

Clean energy is a smart investment that will benefit our health, economy and environment for decades to come. Our country should make sure these investments continue to provide cleaner options for our utilities, which are tasked with meeting our growing electric loads.