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Forum, Jan. 26: A Feeling of Power; This Pope Is No Marxist; Recycle That Glass

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A Feeling of Power

To the Editor:

Thank you, Meredith Angwin, for your statement that "it would be better to choose conservation and grid diversity" than to depend on "cheap" natural gas ("Why Electricity Costs Spiked," Perspectives, Jan. 18). The challenge is creating a diverse grid in a cost-effective and timely manner.

Fortunately, there are ways that individuals can help. In an effort to ensure stability for our family's expenses and to reduce our overall footprint, we installed solar hot water panels in 2009 and solar electric panels in 2011. They are viable and productive here in New Hampshire.

Solar is free and available 365 days each year. During the 30-year lifespan of our 5 kWh photovoltaic electric system, we will generate 150,000 kWhs of power. This is equivalent to removing 22 cars from the road or saving 11,640 gallons of gas. Or, if we wanted to offset this amount of energy by sequestering carbon, we would need to plant 2,652 trees. That's a lot of trees.

After rebates, solar systems cost less than most new cars, and last at least three times longer. In the four years since our solar panels went live, we have generated over 22,200 kWh of electricity, reducing our consumption by 70 percent during that time, and saving $2,400. Since installing hot water panels five years ago, we have used on average 500 gallons less propane each year (25 percent of our annual consumption). We have almost recouped our investment, saving $7,500 over five years (at $3 per gallon).

Ultimately, in a complex world that can leave us feeling as if our individual actions do not matter, we feel powerful generating power. On cold clear days after a storm and on cloudy overcast days we are heating our house and lighting our rooms with the sun's free and available energy. It's cheaper than a new car and starts generating power the minute you plug the system in. The payback is immediate and plentiful.

Help diversify our regional grid. Thanks to Vital Communities, we have the Solarize program to support our efforts in the Upper Valley. This round ends Jan. 31. Sign up. Be powerful. Go solar!
http://www.vitalcommunities.org/solarize/

Lyn Swett Miller

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