Long on words, short on power

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We've quoted the late great P.J. O'Rourke before **that (https://climatediscussionnexus.com/2024/09/18/price-check/)** "Beyond a certain point complexity is fraud.... when someone creates a system in which you can't tell whether or not you're being fooled, you're being fooled." As for instance when it comes to "capacity values" in the electricity system. Not because it's wrong to use technical language when something is inherently technical; on the contrary, specialized terms that convey important complex ideas clearly and simply are a blessing. As when the **Energy Bad Boys (https://energybadboys.substack.com/)** write that "MISO Obliterates Solar, Storage, and Wind Capacity Values". OK, maybe it's a headline that might legitimately baffle people unless clarified in words like "The tide goes out on intermittent, unreliable resources and the utilities that built them". But the point is that the term "capacity values", rather than indicating how much power could reliably be obtained from a generating source, was tweaked to exaggerate the effectiveness of wind and solar energy in ways that, because impenetrable, did constitute fraud. And now the fraud has been exposed. As the EBBs quote Warren Buffet, "You don't find out who's been swimming naked until the tide goes out." The tide is going out in the US and it's not a pretty sight.

Speaking of potentially obscure terminology, "**MISO (https://www.misoenergy.org/)**" is the nickname of the "Midcontinent Independent System Operator", a "regional transmission organization" that **delivers power from plants to local retailers in 15 US states (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midcontinent_Independent_System_Operator)** and also for some reason the Canadian province of Manitoba.) "Capacity values" is a rating of how much electricity various utilities can summon at need. As the Bad Boys **wrote in a different post (https://energybadboys.substack.com/p/epas-green-leap-forward)** back in 2024:

> **"each power plant in the stack is given a reliability rating, known as a capacity value, which allows grid planners to estimate the amount of electricity these plants can reliably produce when it is needed most."**

But as they also say, it was done weirdly in the US under Joe Biden with the obvious goal of making it seem that wind and solar were more reliable than in fact they were. Which is a good way to have the lights go off, as it gives pseudotechnical justification for utilities shutting down coal, gas and nuclear plants that really can produce power on demand and relying instead on the alleged ability of solar to generate at night and wind when it's calm.

It hinges, among other things, on the distinction between "installed capacity" and "reliable capacity," with the former being fairly plainly what various plants can produce under ideal conditions and the other on what they can produce under bad ones. And also on the important subtlety that in the good old days, or bad if you think plant food is carbon pollution, the basic requirement was to make sure that you could generate enough power to meet peak demand during the day, peak demand being easy to calculate reliably just by looking at the pattern, day after day, week after week, season after season, of what time of day your customers used the most power. It varies from place to place, depending particularly on how much AC they use. But in any given place it's dependable, and if you could meet it, you were good because you certainly could also meet lower off-peak demand. But you were good because you were using power plants that you could ramp up or down with a lever and they would draw in more or less fuel and get out more or less power. But once you started relying on a lot of wind and solar, you might be fine for peak demand but be in a heap of trouble at other times of day because you can't ramp up the sun or the wind as needed.

Yes, we know. It seems obvious. But under some circumstances people overlook the obvious, especially when fanaticism meets government and handouts result:

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> **“Smart grid operators make sure there is enough dispatchable power plant capacity on their systems to clear the bar of their projected peak demand and meet their reserve margin. If they want to ‘stack’ wind and solar on top of this grid, it will add expense to the system but won’t compromise reliability. However, as state carbon-free mandates, federal regulations, and subsidies have forced the premature retirement of coal plants and have incentivized the increased usage of wind and solar, grid operators are now beginning to rely on the capacity value of wind and solar to meet their projected peak demand and target reserve margins. This, in our view, is a big no-no because these resources may or may not show up when you need them, which is why we refer to the capacity value of wind and solar as ‘phantom firm’ resources. In essence, grid reliability is becoming more dependent on favorable weather conditions, which is a huge gamble.”**

Although not actually a gamble, because just as if you play roulette long enough you will certainly lose (what did you think pays for all that casino glitz and freebies to entice you in?) and if you rely long enough on power that regularly fails to show up you will surely, one day, come up snake eyes.

Especially if some fool has loaded the dice. That 2024 post notes that:

> **“According to EPA’s own modeling of the MISO grid under the final rule, wind and solar are given generous capacity accreditations that may leave the region short of electricity when the weather doesn’t cooperate.”**

Which is where the lack of swimsuit becomes awkward. Recently MISO created more accurate estimates of reliability for wind and solar, bowing to the poorly-kept secrets that the sun doesn’t shine at night and the wind bloweth where it listeth. Unlike, the Bad Boys now observe, government-regulated entities pressured in various ways by political zealots:

> **“For years, utility companies have pursued a reckless strategy of prematurely retiring their reliable, affordable coal plants while pretending that a combination of wind, solar, and storage could replace their dependable capacity. In our opinion, this strategy was made possible by the fact that wind and solar resources were receiving unrealistically high capacity values in capacity auctions and in utility resource plans, which did not properly account for the fact that wind and solar resources have often failed to show up to work when needed most.”**

As too often, the emperor has no clothes, and does not look good au naturel.

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2 comments on “Long on words, short on power”

Ron Robins (http://climate%20discussion%20nexus) says:

November 4, 2026 at 9:12 am (https://climatediscussionnexus.com/2026/11/04/long-on-words-short-on-power/#comment-28348)

This is the what happens when governments value political success and power over truth. The silent secret of extreme environmentalism is a disdain for humans. We are the scourge , we are the problem. It renounces God giving man dominion over the earth. It sets the path for the “compassionate” depopulation if humans because alas we don’t matter as much as trees or raccoons.

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Roger Graves says:

November 4, 2026 at 2:47 pm (https://climatediscussionnexus.com/2026/11/04/long-on-words-short-on-power/#comment-28406)

It is a universal phenomenon that the more emphasis placed on wind & solar, the higher the price of electricity to the consumer. This is fairly obvious when one considers that there must always be a dispatchable backup for wind & solar whether it is required or not at any given instant, so wind & solar are merely secondary systems on top of an existing system.

A well-written commentary on this recently appeared in the Ottawa Sun newspaper: https://www.fraserinstitute.org/commentary/solar-and-wind-power-make-electricity-more-expensive-thats-a-fact (https://www.fraserinstitute.org/commentary/solar-and-wind-power-make-electricity-more-expensive-thats-a-fact)

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