

Cherries and American Flags

This is a tale of two parades and two very different viewpoints on how to support a small town event. My college age son came home from the Saturday parade at the Cherry Festival in Traverse City with a card he was handed from a passing group. On one side, it simply stated “SAVE THE CHERRY” while on the other it expounded on how power plants were the leading contributor of global warming and thus, ultimately responsible for the poor cherry crop of 2012.

As I have stated before in this column, “REALLY?” The worst crop in 10 years is the direct result of power plants? What is the argument for the previous 9 good crop years? Next year, if the tables turn, will generators of electricity get a “thank you”?

Please, please don’t send me any rants on global warming and all of that. I am not here to debate an issue that even the scientific community doesn’t agree on 100%. Please, please send me your clean, affordable, reliable and fact based solutions to where we will get electricity 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year.

I absolutely support a cleaner environment. The wholesale generation purchased at CEC is cleaner than it has ever been. Our supplier, Wolverine Power Cooperative, purchases an ample supply of renewable energy from the Harvest Wind Farm. Wolverine now owns a portion of two refurbished coal plants in Ohio and Indiana that meet all the EPA requirements. Finally, Wolverine is exploring cleaning up a coal plant near Marquette in partnership with WE Energies. Instead of buying the lowest available market price, Wolverine has put its money into generation that will last for decades, produce around the clock and comply with or exceed every required EPA regulation.

The “Save the Cherry” card referenced 2.2 million people that supported EPA regulations that will significantly reduce carbon emissions on new power plants. Can we then assume those same people will support emissions from old plants that meet EPA regulations? In the name of fairness, I would hope so.

Someone once asked me, “Why do you defend coal so vehemently?” My response was, “Environmental groups force me to.” Misguided campaigns like the most recent “Save the Cherry” cards simply make me hang my head, let out a big sigh and head to the computer. I strongly believe that CEC members need to hear both sides of an issue.

Do I have better things to do? Yes, I do. But, if I ignore an opportunity then I run the risk of giving more strength to groups like those passing out the cherry cards. I feel that if I don’t respond then they will say, “See. It must be true. The electric cooperative has no answer.”

Do I choose to put the debate into an event like a parade? No, I do not. The family of cooperatives buying generation from Wolverine help to sponsor the Thursday parade during the Cherry Festival. Thus, we have a perfect vehicle to promote our agenda. What do we choose to do instead? We simply pass out American flags to support our community, our troops and not politicize such a great event.

Let’s leave the parade to the kids and move energy policy discussions into the halls of our state legislature where they belong. My grandfather was a farmer and taught me how to till the soil a bit so I truly do understand what local farmers are dealing with. We just can’t lay the blame for the bad times on one doorstep, especially if one doesn’t intend to give an ounce of credit when good times knock once again. Maybe next year both parades will celebrate a bumper crop of the cherries we all love!