

What Every Long Islander Should Know: “Long Islanders are Serious about Energy and the Environment”

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

If you hate your LIPA bill now, just wait. With oil prices soaring into the stratosphere, and natural gas prices in their wake, our electric costs are going nowhere but up.

Right now, the Long Island Power Authority is in the process of updating its 10-year Master Energy Plan. Here is a window of opportunity for us to change direction, to trade our crippling fossil-fuel dependency for a sustainable, cost-effective energy supply.

This is not likely to happen, however, unless Long Islanders forge a new relationship with LIPA. We need to stop thinking of LIPA as “them” and start thinking of it as “ours.”

As a public utility, LIPA answers to the public, not shareholders. We are the bosses, but we usually only get involved when it comes to things we don’t want. We rally to stop Shoreham, and Broadwater, and a bad deal for south shore windmills. Fine. But now it’s time for us to tell LIPA what we do want.

It must be a dramatic departure from what we’ve got.

Today, over 95% of the power we generate on Long Island comes from fossil fuels. Fully 55% of our LIPA bills go directly to paying for those fuels. The “fuel surcharges” we all hate? They’re there because the cost of those fuels keeps soaring. Last year, a barrel of oil cost \$62. As of this writing, it’s \$131 and climbing. Natural gas? Its price has doubled in the past year.

So what’s an Island to do?

First, we should support LIPA’s recently announced 10-year “Efficiency Long Island” program. The Island’s energy consumption rates are through the roof and changing that trend through both conservation and efficiencies must be part of the solution.

LIPA’s new request for proposals to develop 50 megawatts of solar energy on the Island is also a good step, albeit a small one, as 50MW represents a mere 1% of the Island’s overall energy needs.

What the Island needs – and must demand – is a major commitment to alternative energy. The Island is blessed with ample supply of both sunshine and wind. Projects that harness these resources are up and running across America and all over Europe. If it’s cost effective for them, then it has to make sense for the region that pays the highest electric rates in the country. The constantly rising price of oil and natural gas can only make them more cost-effective.

While renewable energy is a no-brainer, it’s no sure thing. It’s up to us to make it happen, by letting LIPA know that’s what we want. Contacting them is easy via their website.

Ultimately, we will only get what we demand. If we do nothing, we will continue as we are, paying higher and higher bills for scarcer and scarcer fossil fuels.

If we want something different, now is the time to speak up for it.

Nancy Rauch Douzinas is president of the Rauch Foundation. The “Long Island Index” provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policy making. For more information visit www.longislandindex.org.