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## **‘All of the above’ is the wrong answer**

The illusion of a balanced energy mix makes good rhetoric but poor policy

By Joshua Antonini | August 2025

A majority of U.S. voters favor supplying the country’s energy needs with a mix that includes proven power generation such as oil, coal, and gas as well as politically popular sources like wind and solar. An “all-of-the-above strategy” appeals to 55% of voters, according to polling data from YouGov. Self-styled moderates including Democrat Sen. Elissa Slotkin and Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley are standard-bearers of the all-of-the-above movement.

The only problem is that they’re wrong.

André Béliveau, former Senior Manager of Energy Policy at Pennsylvania’s Commonwealth Foundation, explains the popularity of the phrase: “All-of-the-above’ is a favored term among some lawmakers and energy wonks: a politically friendly phrase that seemingly encompasses all energy sources, offering feel-good, pro-market vibes in a space overcrowded by radical climate progressives.”

But nice phrases can’t keep the lights on. We don’t need to support good and bad options equally. We should support what works.

Imagine a group of movers hired to carry a heavy, ornate grand piano down a flight of stairs. Two of them expect to be able to do it, but they think it would help to bring in a third person. “The more the merrier,” after all. But after each mover has grasped the cumbersome instrument and they’re making their way down the stairs, the third mover drops his part of the burden to check his phone. The other two movers must quickly shift their weight and grip to keep the piano from crashing down the stairs. Once they’ve settled enough to keep moving, the third mover puts his phone away and has them move their grips again so he can “help” (and collect his pay). After doing this repeatedly, with some close calls (and some scrapes to the piano), the two movers realize it’s better not to have such unreliable “help.” They can do it better without him (or get a more reliable friend).

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If it wasn't obvious, unreliable wind and solar are the third mover, and the precious antique piano is the electrical grid that brings power to our society. Grid balance is a complex and high-stakes game. "The more the merrier" requires us to ask, "More of what?"

Every second of every day, the amount of electricity supplied must meet the electricity demanded, or people will experience power outages. "The requirements for electricity on the grid are neither constant nor fully predictable, and electricity must be manufactured and then used within milliseconds," writes Meredith Angwin in *Shorting the Grid*. This balancing act is the job of balancing authorities, who must ensure that production always meets consumption while accounting for the fact that "steam cycle plants change output slowly, while internal combustion plants (gas turbines, diesels) and hydro plants can ramp up and down quickly." Too little electricity supply is an obvious problem, but too much electricity is an issue as well; electrical infrastructure is damaged when too much electricity is transmitted.

Mandating that energy producers incorporate weather-dependent wind and solar into the generation mix makes the balancing authority's already complex task even harder. "With wind and solar, the [balancing authority] cannot control when power is available," Angwin writes.

Wind and solar's intermittency — caused by their dependence on what the weather is doing — is a crippling flaw that policymakers have forced producers to build into our nation's electric grid. Operators of the grid have repeatedly warned of that flaw. The all-of-the-above approach ignores the problems that wind and solar add.

All-of-the-above is the compromise position that allows wind and solar to continue to maintain the preferential treatment they get from politicians. These sources receive more in federal subsidies than all other forms of energy put together, as Brent Bennett at the Texas Public Policy Foundation explains in his report on federal energy subsidies "The Siren Song That Never Ends."

"All of the Above' could imply that since you want to use some of each type of energy, government should step in and promote or protect energy sources that aren't doing well in the market," says Josiah Neely, energy director at the R Street Institute. "All sorts of policies, from subsidies and mandates to restrictions or bailouts are at least theoretically consistent with the All of the Above label."

To quote Béliveau, "So long as we do not prioritize reliability and affordability, we sacrifice both."

"I have never been for 'all of the above,'" says Secretary of Energy Chris Wright. "I'm against energy sources that make the energy system more expensive or less reliable."

Remember, every dollar spent on shoehorning wind and solar into our grid is a dollar not spent on dependable generation or reliability measures. Which should lead us to our next logical question, "Why 'All of the above' and not 'Only the best'?"

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