

GUEST VIEWPOINT

Too many inefficiencies built into energy use

By Sara Schaffzin

In the quest for sustainability, there's been some good news lately. Dryden's fracking ban was upheld by a state appeals court, Solarize Tompkins SE is rounding up homeowners for a solar panel buying club, and a new study co-authored by the Cornell duo of Anthony Ingraffea and Robert Howarth proclaims that New York can convert completely to renewable energy by 2030.

However, getting off fossil fuels and finding new energy sources is only half the picture, and not the most important half. Whatever gains we make by substituting renewables for oil, gas and coal will be more than offset by the spiraling demand for energy itself. Projected increases in demand for computing power alone — to run smart grids as well as digital devices — should give us pause. Consider this: According to a recent New York Times article, carbon dioxide emissions from (inefficiently run) data centers will quadruple by 2020, and even more worrisome, a study by Australia's Centre for Energy Efficient Telecommunications finds that growing reliance on the cloud is causing energy use to spiral and will create a far worse scenario than the already-problematic data centers.

For the time being, we are stuck with fossil fuels to build an energy infrastructure for the future. It will be better in the long run to invest those fuels in an alternative energy system, rather than use them to frack — and build pipelines and compressor stations — for more fossil fuels. But even solar panels have environmental costs. Their manufacture produces highly toxic waste, which must be disposed of safely, as must the toxin-laden solar panels themselves, which eventually will need to be replaced. While we can feel good about installing solar panels on our rooftops to produce clean energy, someone, somewhere has to deal with their toxic residues.

I'm not saying that we should disavow solar power or unplug ourselves from cyberspace. But we desperately need to put the brakes on our voracious energy consumption. The phrase "reduce, reuse, recycle" may seem shopworn, but it is truer now than ever. We need to tread more lightly on the earth, and while Tompkins County is ahead of other places in many ways, there is just so much that can be done on a local level.

We as a society need to take a hard, honest look at the waste and inefficiency that is built into our manufacturing, urban planning and building design, agriculture, transportation and communications sectors. We need elected officials who are truly committed to a lower-energy-consumption future, and to funding the research to take us there.

It's been decades since President Jimmy Carter



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Graduation a day to savor

Before facing the world, go to commencement first

By Vicki L. Bogan

As a university professor, I have found my true calling in life. I love *almost* all aspects of the profession.

One of the activities that I enjoy the most is attending the graduation ceremonies. Each one of my personal graduation ceremonies was special and memorable for different reasons. Thus, it always saddens me when one of my students does not attend graduation. Upon hearing that anyone is planning to skip graduation, I always try to persuade that person to reconsider by offering my top five reasons for attending your own graduation ceremony.

First, education is a blessing not to be squandered or taken for granted. During the course of history, many different peoples around the world have fought for the right to be educated at all levels. Even if this particular high school, college, or graduate degree is not your final goal in life, you should celebrate the opportunity that you had to get an education.

Second, graduations are an

important time for self-reflection. Graduations signify an end to a particular phase of your life. Self-reflection is advisable. Be thankful for what you were able to accomplish and ponder what you would like your life to be like during the next phase. Taking the time for self-reflection is much more difficult after you have already started the next phase of your life.

Third, even if you think that the pomp and circumstance surrounding graduation is banal or boring, allow the family and friends in your life the opportunity to celebrate and be proud. In most cases, a number of people have invested in you with emotional and/or financial support. As a college finance professor, I often ask students: "How much money has your family spent for you to receive a college degree? \$50,000? \$100,000? \$200,000? What else could your family have done with that amount of money? My guess is — a lot." So let your family members celebrate their financial and emotional investment. Allow them to experience the

college to which they gave so much of their emotional energy and disposable income.

Fourth, while you may have the best intentions of keeping in touch with some of your school friends, more often than not, it does not happen. This may be the last time you ever see some of your friends. Take the opportunity to make some lasting memories with them.

Finally, the world can be cruel. In particular, the first transition years after graduation can be difficult. There are very few times in life when people get together just to celebrate you and your accomplishments. Enjoy this reaffirming and all-too-rare occurrence.

Whether you are getting your high school diploma, college degree or Ph.D., do not pass on graduation. Whether you are graduating summa cum laude, magna cum laude or thank you laude, go to your graduation ceremony. It is time well spent.

Bogan is an associate professor at Cornell University.