

My Antifederalist Response to Doug Van Essen's Federalist Editorial

by Joseph Parnell McCarter

Mr. Doug Van Essen penned an editorial opposing a charter for Ottawa County. The charter would simply be a county level constitution the citizens could approve or reject. It would give the county more local control at a time when the UN, Federal Government, and State Government are all imposing a misguided agenda. It should both acknowledge Almighty God like our Michigan Constitution and include a Bill of Rights like the Federal Constitution. One primary practical use of the charter would be to stop the closure of the county's Campbell plant which provides electric to 1 million regional customers at a time the grid is already at an elevated risk level.

Could it be that Mr. Van Essen does not like County citizens to have that much power? Could it be Mr. Van Essen is a quintessential Federalist who distrusts American voters and wants to keep decision-making in the hands of elites "who know better"? In early US political history the Antifederalists stood for bottom-up governance by the citizens, but the Federalists opposed them to make it as top-down as politically possible.

Apparently Mr. Van Essen believes the voters would not have done as well as the Board in selecting a county administrator. Could they have selected someone as good as John Shay who oversaw the "evaporation" of \$57 million of ARPA funds? Or could they have selected someone as good as John Gibbs who the Board has stripped of hiring powers?

The county administrator should be elected by the citizens and subject to recall, as well as subject to impeachment by the Board (forcing reelection to resume service). These features of accountability should be built into the county charter.

Mr. Van Essen asserts: "they want the people to confer authority in Ottawa County government to operate in fields that are traditionally left to the private sector, such as electricity generation." It is ironic that he makes this claim in Holland's newspaper, given Holland, Zeeland, and Grand Haven successfully have municipalized electric. The "Save The Campbell" effort just extends it to the rest of Ottawa County and calls for it to be in a separate member-owned electric cooperative. It is not like Consumer's Energy is your typical private enterprise. It is a State-regulated monopoly that has shown it bends to the globalist agenda and takes care of its investors but not enough to the interests of Ottawa County citizens.

The cooperative's elected Board could either contract its Campbell operation to Consumers Energy (the preferred option) or a similarly experienced operator, at an acceptable negotiated price, or could hire management personnel experienced in the industry. Locally-controlled cooperatives have a better record than regulated monopolies in price and service.

Ottawa County, and the electric cooperative it would transfer Campbell title to, would not be picking up the cost of fly ash remediation, unlike Mr. Van Essen's assertion. That cost, along with the savings Consumers Energy would enjoy from not having to demolish the Campbell plant, would be subtracted from the purchase price of the Campbell plant. Then the cooperative would manage the fly ash in a more environmentally responsible manner than Consumer's has, by commercially selling it (at subsidized rates if necessary) and not letting it dangerously accumulate on site.

Ottawa County has an interest in the electric provided by the Campbell plant, and the May 2025 closure decision was made without due consideration of all relevant facts. For example, they never considered the use of Allam Cycle technology for carbon dioxide sequestration. And it is outrageous that a far more polluting East Michigan plant gets to stay open until 2032 while the much cleaner West Michigan plant has to close in 2025.

He says "no counties...are currently building...coal-fired coal plants..." Building a new coal-fired plant is not under consideration here. What is under consideration is stopping the May 2025 closure and subsequent demolition. It is not arrogant to keep alive something which is already working, and the Campbell is working well. The same cannot be said for Governor Whitmer's plan for replacement.

But Mr. Van Essen's central argument is that what is involved in the Campbell plant is "just too complicated and risky" for Ottawa County to take on- said in true Federalist fashion. He thinks we need to leave it to the experts who plan on demolishing the Campbell plant. No thanks. Antifederalists dismiss the Federalist view that most local citizens must be helpless slaves to globalist elites.