

Renewable Energy Not Only Practical But Urgently Needed

by David Kyler, Center for a Sustainable Coast

Contrary to the recent opinion column by nuclear engineer, Nolan Hertel, an array of reputable U.S. energy experts say that renewables have great promise for completely replacing other sources of electrical power generation in America within two decades.

In fact, two of these well-qualified energy engineers co-authored a cover article in *Scientific American* way back in 2010 that set forth a well-reasoned, detailed strategy to attain fully renewable power in the U.S. by 2035.

Two factors have impeded the promising potential to attain a more successful conversion to clean power: (1) misleading opinion that favors conventional sources (primarily fossil-fuels) and those who profit from them, and (2) policies that, thanks to a Supreme Court decision, overwhelmingly benefit major donors who have “skin in the game” of energy production.

Expenditures on political campaigns by the Koch Brothers and other fossil-fuel capitalists such as Exxon Mobile dwarf donations made by clean energy entrepreneurs and investors. “Oil Change International” reports that, for many years, oil and gas producers have sunk hundreds of millions annually into U.S. Congressional and Presidential Campaigns, for which they’ve been abundantly rewarded.

According to their analysis, the fossil fuel industry has received about \$119 in benefits for every dollar they’ve spent on political persuasion through campaign donations – a lavish return on their self-serving corruption of public policy that reinforces protection of industry interests at the public’s expense.

“Clean Technica” and other energy-industry analysts report that fossil fuels receive a MINIMUM of some \$20 billion annually in U.S. subsidies, and have received huge government support for most of the past century. Despite assertions of those who disparage clean power (solar and wind) as impractical and overly dependent on government support, actually nuclear power and fossil fuels continue receiving far more tax dollars and write-offs, as they have throughout the many decades of their existence.

In fact, without American taxpayers carrying the burden of liability costs in the event of nuclear disasters, the nuke power industry wouldn’t exist. Moreover, even with such monumental subsidies, nuclear power projects are notoriously over budget and behind schedule. Georgia Power’s expansion of Plant Vogtle – if ever completed – will cost at least twice the original estimate, while ensuring an 11% return for investors regardless of performance, under Georgia’s outdated and unfair utilities law.

Not only are U.S. energy subsidies the opposite of what is often claimed, but a convincing argument has been made that transferring fossil-fuel subsidies to clean energy could yield huge savings for citizens and consumers. In May 2017, a study released by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) found that redirecting public funds from fossil fuels to clean energy would help cut the costs of adverse impacts caused by using dirty energy. Those impacts include hundreds of thousands of respiratory illnesses induced by polluted air as well as increasing damage to property and other valuable resources caused by wildfire, major storms, and loss of food supplies – from both land and sea.

Similarly, in Georgia, instead of being forced to squander billions of dollars for expanding Plant Vogtle, consumers and taxpayers could have benefitted from implementing clean energy across the entire state.

Beware of those who discredit new technology when they are deeply vested in conventional sources of profit. And be equally skeptical of arguments asserting the impracticality of innovation when history clearly demonstrates otherwise.

Rigorous support of clean energy is especially important as the nation faces unprecedented damages brought by an overheating climate. Trillions of dollars in future costs avoided are unquestionably worth billions of investment now. U.S. policies must be reformed to serve the public, not fossil-fuel investors.