

## GUEST COLUMN

## Renewable energy an urgent necessity

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 billion 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 nuclear 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 percent 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.

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.

**David Kyler,**  
Center for a Sustainable Coast



## Yes, the Supreme Court is an undemocratic institution

In an era of partisan polarization, it is rare to get agreement on anything, but about this there should be a consensus: The Supreme Court is an undemocratic institution whose power should be carefully circumscribed.

The right has long been of this view, and the left is suddenly and opportunistically part-way there. In an essay capturing progressives' newfound skepticism, Ezra Klein of *Vox* wrote that the Supreme Court "has always been undemocratic" and is now becoming even "more dangerous."

This represents a welcome turnabout from cheering the high court's de facto legislating, although the left is about a half-century late to the insight that the court isn't a democratically elected legislature.

In the 1960s, the court became markedly more assertive, delivering a raft of activist decisions, especially on matters of criminal justice and sexual morality.

Progressives cheered all the while. They happily pocketed all the court-mandated policy changes to their liking, relieved of the burden of enacting them through democratic means.

Needless to say, the court was never meant to be an unelected lawmaking body, and it has taken on such a highly charged role in our politics, in part, because it arrogated this power to itself. The court's legitimacy comes from faithfully interpreting laws passed by the legislature and adhering to the Constitution that is the foundational governing document of the country, adopted and amended by "We the People." Anything else is a usurpation.

Progressives are, perversely, taking a hostile view of the court precisely when it may get a reliable majority of justices devoted to this vision. Klein alleges that the court is becoming affirmatively "anti-democratic," meaning it isn't striking down demo-

cratically adopted voter rules and gerrymandered districts.

Klein may oppose the Ohio law that purges nonvoters from the rolls, but there is a remedy readily at hand; changing the law in Ohio.

If the left were serious about its new worries about an undemocratic court, it would welcome the prospect of overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Indeed, the belief that voters in states will ban abortion or more stringently regulate it if *Roe* is overturned is the single biggest motivating factor in opposition to Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh.

In other words, on this issue, the worry is that the court will allow too much democracy. Of course, the court should act as a check on the popular will at times. But in doing so, it must limit itself to enforcing the law and the Constitution. This is the goal of originalism, which

**Rich Lowry**  
Syndicated columnist



should be embraced by both sides as the appropriately modest view of the court's role in our republic.

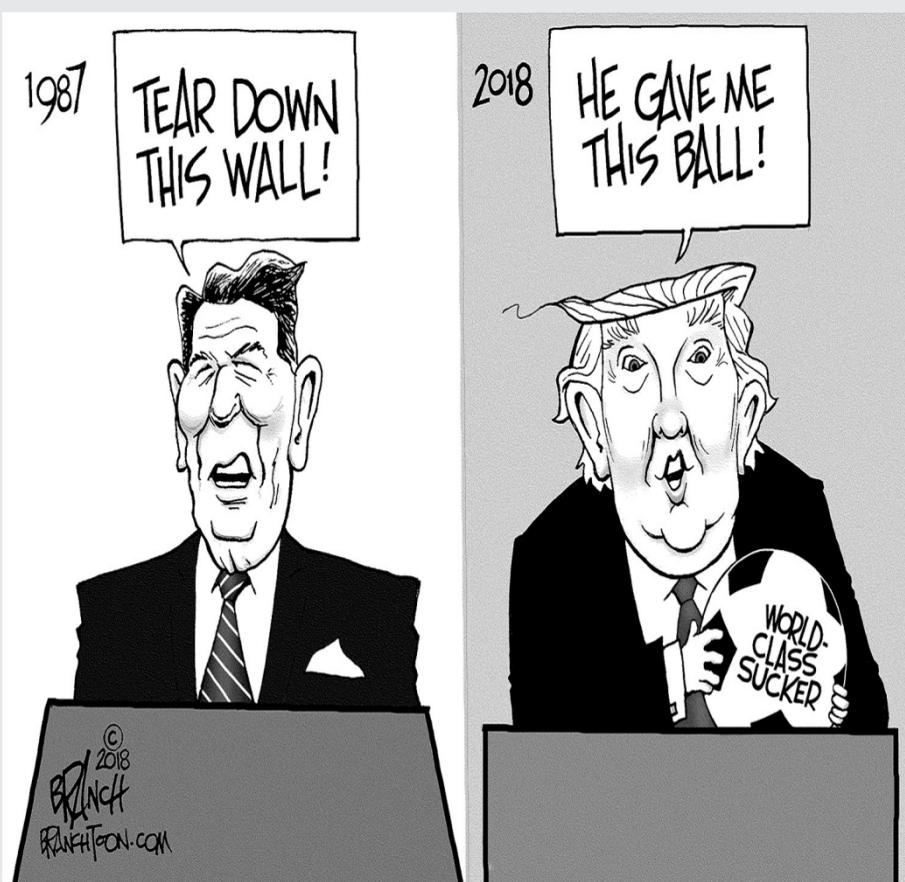
But this would represent an enormous loss for progressives. First, a court that no longer envisions itself as an instrument of social change wouldn't hand the left totalist victories unachievable in the political realm. Two, the animating vision behind the Constitution -- written by men with a strong suspicion of centralized power -- runs counter to the logic of progressive government.

So the left will bang on about the undemocratic court without changing its core belief that it is rightfully the vehicle for imposing its policies.

*Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.*

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## SCOTUS ivory tower is Ivy league

**Bob Franken**  
Syndicated columnist



Is it possible that only Ivy League law schools produce attorneys who have what it takes to climb to the top of this country's jurisprudence heap? This heap's pinnacle, of course, is the U.S. Supreme Court.

Apparently, we have evolved to a nation where the SCOTUS ivory tower is exclusively the Ivy tower. Even President Donald Trump. The rabble rouser-in-chief, is said to have factored in Brett Kavanaugh's Yale pedigree when he chose him for another new haven. Assuming the Senate complies, he will cluster with the Supremes:

five Harvard, three other Yalies and one (Ginsburg) who attended Harvard Law before switching to Columbia.

Kavanaugh would replace Anthony Kennedy, who is a Harvard alum, so Yale would pick up an elite seat. Isn't diversity great? But are those universities so inherently superior, particularly when you consider the fact that Trump graduated from one (Penn), and George W. Bush got his degree from Yale? Maybe sometimes it just doesn't take. But is it that or is it that the Ivies are overrated, or that some of the others are underrated?

Even if you set aside Stanford, which many describe as just a West Coast Ivy, with Sandra Day O'Connor and William Rehnquist as alums, what

about the University of Michigan or Virginia, not to mention Georgetown?

They are among many with sterling programs. Those programs graduate scads of brilliant lawyers. But they're still not regarded as the super-elites.

Maybe that's Ivy League self-serving PR. Maybe the critics are correct when they charge that the most important courses at any of them include Hubris, Entitlement and, most important of all, Networking. Look no further than the Supremes.

I remember sitting in a green room with a former news type who had escaped the frenetic riffraff world of reporting, and now was enjoying the leisurely, elegant life as an academic at Princeton. What classes he taught obviously

had to do with journalism. Making small talk, I insincerely commented that he must enjoy the stimulation of interacting with and molding fresh student minds, particularly the brightest of the bright, in an Ivy League school. "Not really," he snapped, "Most of these kids just got into Princeton because they did what they're told."

He meant that they grew up excelling at sucking up to all their teachers; not making waves, and getting high grades as a result. Either that or they were admitted because the parents were willing to make a huge contribution to the already heavily endowed institution of higher learning.

What can get lost in all this is the common touch and common sense. When it is automatically

assumed that brilliance can shine only overhead, we fail to illuminate the worthy experience of those who labor below.

Life at the top is insular. What we have created in this nation is a nearly impenetrable caste system.

At the Supreme Court, society's rules are ultimately interpreted by justices who were indoctrinated by their education to protect the advantages of the ruling class.

Yes, a number of them are progressive, a dwindling number. But their Ivy League advantage is really the disadvantage of intellectual inbreeding.

*Bob Franken is an Emmy Award-winning reporter who covered Washington for more than 20 years with CNN.*

"If there was one decision I would overrule, it would be 'Citizens United.' I think the notion that we have all the democracy that money can buy strays so far from what our democracy is supposed to be."

"So that's the dissenter's hope: that they are writing not for today but for tomorrow."

"All I can say is I am sensitive to discrimination on any basis because I have experienced that upset."

Ruth Bader Ginsburg