

Watt's Happening? #137

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Two Steps Forward, One Step Back



Vested interests and political ideology will always put up roadblocks to change, but change keeps on happening anyway. This modern, attractive home in Dawson Creek now receives 80 percent of its power from sunlight.

Regular readers of *Watt's Happening* will know that global investment in wind and solar has exceeded investments in fossil fuels and nuclear combined for three years now. Well, things aren't exactly slowing down, but political ideology can always give it a try.

In spite of Trump's best efforts, the clean energy industry in the U.S. continues to grow and is now worth an amazing US \$200 billion a year.

Worldwide, it's the same story. Clean energy is a US\$1.4 trillion industry globally, well ahead of air travel and catching up to media. The growth rate of the global clean energy sector is close to 7 percent annually, more than twice the growth rate of the overall global economy.

Solar has thoroughly taken over from wind as the leading source of new energy in the world. The International Renewable Energy Agency reports that last year peaked

at almost 100,000 megawatts (MW) of new solar installed world wide, while wind declined somewhat to about 50,000 new megawatts.

And then there's China, installing some 40,000 MW of solar this year alone. That's 315,000 standard 350-watt solar panels each and every day!

So don't let anybody tell you that the clean, "New Energies" of wind and solar are a niche market or a passing fad. Hardly.

MEGA WIND ENERGY

GE and Invenergy are building the largest wind farm in US history (and the second largest in the world after Gansu, China) in Oklahoma. GE is supplying the 800, 2.5 MW turbines for a total peak capacity of 2000 MW.

The facility is part of the Wind Catcher Energy Connection that also includes 350 miles of dedicated, extra high voltage power line connecting the wind farm to Tulsa. This will be the first use of GE's new Digital Wind Farm concept that takes wind farm efficiency to a new level.

NOVA SCOTIA GETS SMART

The Nova Scotia government has recently revealed the SolarHomes Program to help Nova Scotians save money on their electricity bills by installing solar panels.

The program is administered by Efficiency Nova Scotia, which will give homeowners a \$1 per watt rebate, or roughly one third of the installed cost of a solar electricity system. The average rebate will be about \$7,000 up to a maximum of \$10,000 per household.

Funding comes from the Federal Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund. The province is also investing \$3 million a year for four years to support the fund.

ONTARIO GETS STUPID

Ontario has gone for short-term political gain over long-term economic prosperity.

The new government there has decided to walk away from some 758 renewable energy contracts, citing savings to ratepayers.

Minister of Energy Greg Rickford said the government intends to introduce a legislative

amendment that, if passed, will protect consumers from any costs incurred from the cancellations.

The cancelled projects are those that have not reached project development milestones to maximize benefits to ratepayers, claiming a savings of some \$790 million.

Sounds good, but they don't mention the huge crash this will cause in the growing wind and solar industries in that province. Thousands will lose their jobs, and billions of investment dollars will go elsewhere.

And the real reason for expensive power in Ontario? Fifty years of very heavy nuclear industry subsidies. Once promising to bring trillions into Ontario coffers, the failing nuclear industry has instead cost Ontario ratepayers billions in subsidies every year for half a century.

Once thought to provide "cheap, safe, unlimited power" nuclear has proven to be the most expensive, dangerous and complex energy source ever invented. The upcoming decommissioning of existing nuclear plants in Ontario will cost taxpayers even more billions.

Renewables, on the other hand, just keep getting cheaper. Backing off on investing in the truly "cheap, safe and unlimited" energies of wind and solar is ideological and political, not good economics.

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A ROCKY ROAD

Ideology and politics will continue to upset the move to clean energy as those hoping to save a few short-term bucks or get a few more votes sacrifice our collective future.

But the global trend is clear: the human world, just like the natural world, will be powered by the limitless, safe and inexpensive renewable energies of wind and sun . . . if and when we so choose.