

Watt's Happening? #161

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Things can change *if we change them*



There will be no shortage of jobs during a global transition to the clean energies of solar and wind.

Many of my columns focus on answers and “what you can do”: solar power, the three R’s, electric transportation, vote Green, reduce wasteful consumption. Occasionally I have to throw in one of these, however: *it’s time to panic!*

One of the themes I stress in this column is the remarkable knowledge and ability that the human race now possesses, something people greatly under rate. Most folks, I think, are still in a 1950’s mind set, unaware of how far we have come in the last 70 years.

That’s understandable, because how far we have come is astonishing. A city the size of Seattle built somewhere on planet Earth EVERY MONTH. About one half million solar panels, big ones, installed around the world EVERY DAY. Our knowledge of ecosystems, planetary weather, biology and medicine, space science, robotic manufacturing, artificial intelligence, materials science ... the list is endless, with knowledge almost doubling every

year.

If we want to build a much better world, one powered with the infinitely renewable energies of nature, growing food sustainably, stabilizing our suddenly erratic climate, and ending poverty and inequality, we can do it. We actually can.

Thirty years of sustained effort, maybe 20, and we’re well on our way. That’s nothing.

And no problem with employment. All of our energy sources must become sustainable: wind and solar, geothermal and tidal, wave and other energies perfected.

All this requires people, jobs. All jobs. From carpenters, heavy equipment operators and pipe liners to engineers and project managers. No new technologies are required. We only need to



implement, on a massive scale, what we already know how to do.

PAYING FOR IT

But how will we pay for it, the skeptics ask? How are we paying for it now? I answer. A new Seattle every month, hundreds of billions a year on war and armament, an ocean full of plastic waste. How is this being paid for now?

We are paying for it with a neglected and dangerous environment, disease and hunger, poverty and war, while other species are paying for it with their lives.

Clearly it is not a matter of lack of resources, money, technology, knowledge, brainpower or muscle. If we can alter the whole planetary weather system without a plan or awareness, sort of accidentally, then imagine what we could do if we brought the matter to global awareness (as we are doing now) and then decided to improve things? Is there anything we could not do?

PROBLEMS SOLVED

There are no technical problems we cannot solve. A modern automated factory can produce gas cars or electric cars. A carpenter can build a barely insulated nasty McMansion, or a super-comfortable home that takes almost nothing to heat, collects its

own water, treats its own waste and generates all its own electricity.

To say that we cannot do these things without “wrecking the economy” is absurd, relegating our species and most of those we share our little planet with to an early and unpleasant extinction.

The way we do things NOW is wrecking the economy. We can dump only so much waste into the air and water and land without the mess eventually catching up with us. It has caught up with us.

WISDOM AND WARNING

Bill Nye, the science guy, puts it this way on a viral video where he sets a plastic globe ablaze: *“By the end of this century, if emissions keep rising, the average temperature on Earth will go up another four to eight degrees. What I am saying is the planet is on f***king fire! There are a lot of things we can do to put it out. Are any of them free? No, of course not – nothing is free*

you idiots! You’re adults now, and this is an actual crisis.”

And 16-year old climate leader Greta Thunberg: *“I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic... I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if your house is on fire. Because it is.”*

In other words, things can change if we change them.

Next issue: more answers.

“You’re adults now, and this is an actual crisis.”



This solar array in Hudson's Hope, BC, provides about half of the power needed for their sewage treatment facility and should continue to do so with no moving parts and no pollution for at least 30 years.