

Watt's Happening? #189

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CHANGE HAPPENS



Solar and wind are heading to exceed electricity produced from both coal and gas in just a few years, and with this rapid change comes lots of high quality jobs. Here crews are installing a wind turbine foundation at Bear Mountain Wind Park near Dawson Creek, BC.

Every two weeks for the last seven years I have sat to write another *Watt's Happening* 700-word essay on energy, life, "the universe and everything." Picking a topic has never been easy – there is so much to say and saying it seems to be getting more important every day.

Let's try three short topics: a clean energy update, a rant on 'sustainable growth' and a plea to governments to enable rapid change.

RENEWABLES CONTINUE TO SURGE

Global solar and wind capacity is on track to double over the next five years and outstrip both coal and gas,

according to a new report from the International Energy Agency (IEA).

The report sees wind and solar installations increasing by 1,123 gigawatts by 2025, enough to exceed global gas capacity in 2023 and coal in 2024.

"In sharp contrast to other fuels, renewables used to generate electricity have grown by almost 7% in 2020" despite the turndown in energy demand caused by the global pandemic.

Supporting the conclusions of many other studies, the IEA sees renewables, mostly wind and solar, accounting for 95% of new energy installed capacity over the next five years, as cost for these energy sources continues to fall.

This surge in renewables will fill one third of global electricity production while “ending coal’s five decades as the top power provider.”

Within five years total renewable generation will hit 9,745 terrawatt hours, “equivalent to the combined demand of China and the European Union” says the IEA.

Well, we’ll see. There will be a lot of politics between today and five years from now, but overall the news is good: the global energy supply is quickly becoming cleaner, faster than anybody thought possible just a few years ago. That’s GOOD news.

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH?

To your average politician, the living world is something they know they are supposed to be concerned about. They like to use the word ‘environment’ to describe what they are so concerned about, and that they supposedly want to ‘protect’ it, whatever that means.

The word ‘environment’ is so nebulous it’s pretty well meaningless. What picture does it create in your mind? What is it, exactly? Everything, I guess, so yes, they care about and want to protect everything.

And they intend to do this by acting ‘sustainably.’ Then it became ‘sustainable development’, and then, as the last nail in the coffin of the idea, ‘sustainable growth.’

Sorry folks, no such thing. Never-ending growth of any kind cannot possibly be sustainable. As we now know, several additional Earths will be required to allow all of humanity to live in a suburban house with two cars and a nice lawn. We’ve just got this one little

planet, no more.

Now sustainable growth and sustainability are used interchangeably. It drives me crazy.

BIG CHANGE CAN HAPPEN

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that big change can happen, and that it can happen much more quickly than anybody thought possible.

Climate change is becoming humanity’s biggest shared challenge. It seems overwhelming because there is so little we can do as individuals. Be as green a consumer as we can be (and so we most certainly should) we will not really have much effect on the global situation.

We are trapped in a system that makes it impossible to live our lives (eating, getting to work, staying warm in the winter and cool in the summer so we can continue to work and sleep, keeping a roof over our heads...) without adding to the problem by emitting carbon.

But big change happens. Human beings are quick to adopt new technologies. We went from horses to cars in 15 years in many places. We got along without plastics for thousands of years, and then in a few years it is everywhere. We went from telephones attached

to a wall by a wire to super-phones attached to super-computers we carry in our pockets, all in the blink of an eye.

If we have the need, the will and the right policies, we can quickly build a better world in the face of a true emergency. The need is clear, the will is mostly there and growing. Now it’s time for the right government policies to help make it happen.

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