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Energy & Environment

Our panel of insiders discusses key issues

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2010

What's A Winning Strategy For Renewables?

By Amy Harder

How can renewable energy keep up the momentum?

In the last year, renewables have been **booming**, according to recent **reports**. But due to the recession, electricity demand isn't increasing as much as anticipated, and experts say that could translate into lower demand for all new sources of electricity, including renewables. On top of that, President Obama recently told Democrats that "we're not going to be able to ramp up solar and wind to suddenly replace every other energy source anytime soon, and the economy still needs to grow. So we've got to look at how to make existing technologies and options better." And in his State of the Union address, Obama threw his weight behind nuclear energy and offshore drilling.

For the immediate future, how can renewable sources of electricity position themselves to become the top energy source? How should Congress balance emerging technologies with existing ones? Is it wise for Obama to pour resources into adapting traditional technologies, like clean coal, or should he focus more on wind, solar and other renewable sources of energy?

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FEBRUARY 22, 2010 10:56 AM



Coming Down To Earth

By David Parker

President, American Gas Association

1

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AGA has long supported, to the fullest extent possible, the development of a diverse domestic energy supply, including coal, oil, nuclear, wind, hydro, solar and, of course, natural gas. As Energy Secretary Steven Chu recently told our board of directors, natural gas is a necessary component of any truly renewable energy program.

And, while everyone is encouraged by the increased awareness being brought to renewables, the fact remains that all of the power produced by alternative and renewable fuel sources meets only a small portion of the country's daily energy needs. A realistic plan for a low-carbon future, therefore, must include, and support, traditional and proven fuel sources like natural gas.

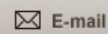
While coal has historically been the dominant fuel in America's domestic resource base, natural gas has begun to play an increasingly important role in electricity generation. With major energy producers publicly turning to natural gas as their fuel of choice, the message is clear – as the cleanest of all fossil fuels, natural gas can provide the ...

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Job Creation is a Winning Strategy

By **Rhone Resch**

President & CEO, Solar Energy Industries Association

Do you agree?

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Last week I joined with executives from the wind, hydropower, biomass, and geothermal industries to talk about the most important thing renewables generate aside from clean energy: jobs.

We've seen the results of enacting the right policies. Last year's stimulus bill, signed a year ago at a museum with a solar installation on its roof, helped to create 18,000 new solar industry jobs. These jobs include plumbers, electricians, and construction workers – the backbone of our economy. These are jobs that can't be shipped overseas.

We can keep up that momentum by enacting forward-looking policies in the jobs bill. Those policies include:

- Extending the Treasury Grant Program for two years
- Returning \$2 billion to the Department of Energy Loan Guarantee Program that was used to extend the "cash for clunkers" program
- Extending the manufacturing tax credit
- Establishing the Clean Energy Deployment Administration, commonly called the Clean Energy Bank

With the right policies in place, the solar industry can focus on creating jobs and deploying more clean energy nationwide.

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All renewable biomass should be equal

By **Donna Harman**

CEO, American Forest & Paper Association

1

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The American Forest & Paper Association supports President Obama's call for more domestic energy generation from all sources. We also support the important role that renewable energy can play alongside traditional sources in the emerging energy economy. Access to affordable energy is vitally important to American manufacturers' global competitiveness, and an abundant supply of energy helps send the right market signals.

The forest products industry embraced renewable energy early in the last century and today generates two-thirds of its own power onsite from carbon-neutral renewable biomass. The 28.5 million megawatt hours the industry generates annually is greater than all solar, wind and geothermal energy generation combined. Excess power is often sold to the grid, making the industry an important, existing source of renewable energy.

The industry's considerable contributions to our country's existing renewable energy base provide an important foundation on which our nation can build a larger renewable energy economy. As our country...

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Unlocking Clean, Renewable Jobs

By **Bill Meadows**

President, The Wilderness Society

7

agree

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The nation's investment in renewable energy is broader than just putting steel in the ground, and must be significantly increased. I haven't seen a poll or credible opinion leader that suggested any different. Over-reliance on fossil fuels has put our economy and our national security in jeopardy. For years, investment in renewables has languished. Surely other energy sources will continue to play a major role but standing up a domestic renewable industry is crucial to a successful transition to a clean energy economy.

economy.

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Federal investments must be made with an eye toward sustaining our natural heritage. Innovative generation and transmission technologies should be promoted that reduce impacts to land and wildlife. Energy efficiency technologies must be deployed broadly so we do more with the power we already generate. And large-scale renewable facilities must be guided to suitable places, especially on the public lands. There are specific things renewable companies can do to enhance their ability to succeed in the near term. Because public lands, al...

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FEBRUARY 15, 2010 2:57 PM



Business Opportunities Abound

By **Graciela Chichilnisky**

Director, Columbia Consortium for Risk Management, and Professor of Economics and Statistics, Columbia University

3

agree
Submit

Renewable energy is undoubtedly the business opportunity of the century, particularly for the US. China is already there - it leads the exports of solar and wind equipment -- and it is up to us to grab what is ours. We cannot afford to lose this opportunity. Renewable energy can give a new life to the \$50 trillion power plant industry around the world - this \$50 trillion figure comes from the International Energy Agency - and while this has been said before, this time around it will.

Silicon Valley understands the challenge and the opportunity - as clean tech is its most dynamic investment sector.

We have the know - how, the innovative spirit and the patents, the technology and the expertise, and we definitely need those new jobs.

How should this all work out?

The energy industry is the key player here. It is transforming itself - and must do so faster and better in this world -changing game. The power plant industry can build any sort of power plant - as long as it makes money. They should build renewables - geothermal, wind farms, hydroelectric, solar, as well as cleaner versions of fossil fuels plants that use CCS (carbon capture and storage) whenever possible and available. Concentrated solar power plants are the preferred alternative because solar is the only energy source that can produce enough energy to replace fossils. The rest are all limited in supply and this includes nuclear - since nuclear fuel is scarce, and in addition nuclear plants have well known strategic risks (think of Iran).

Right now concentrated solar power is not quite competitive with coal in producing electricity - but - here is the important point - they have a steep 'learning curve' that shows that soon they will be - see the DOE for detailed data on costs and learning curves.

Air capture of carbon dioxide is the new kid in the block. It is preferable to the conventional carbon capture and storage from the flue because - by intelligent use of cogeneration, it can make a fossil power plant "carbon negative" - namely can transform a fossil plant onto a net sink of CO₂, something that traditional CCS cannot do. And it can retrofit existing power plants - something that traditional CCS cannot do at a reasonable cost.

My preferred scenario is to build carbon negative power plants in low income low emitting nations - Africa, Latin America, Small Island States - and use the Kyoto Protocol Clean Development Mechanism to fund this - for this purpose I have already introduced wording in December 2009 into the CDM Agreement in Copenhagen COP XV. This would allow the Kyoto Protocol carbon market that I designed and wrote into the Protocol - a \$125 billion a year market in the European Union EUTS -- to help fund such power plants.

This way we provide added power for development and will also help clean the planet's atmosphere. Yes, clean the atmosphere, because "carbon negative" means that Africa, Latin America and Small Island States -- which emit only 3%, 5% and 0.3% of the world CO₂ respectively -- can together capture and store 20 to 40% of the world's emissions as needed. Storage can be in oil deposits as CCS uses at present, or even better into cement and plastics as is currently being developed. This is all real and possible, and we should do it. For example in island nations or in the Middle East, existing algae technology can transform waste into clean water, fuel and electricity. When algae are

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fueled by CO₂ captured from air, the process becomes a powerful one-stop renewable energy solution that reduces carbon from the atmosphere and can prevent the worst risks of climate change -- while producing drinkable water and fueling economic development.

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FEBRUARY 15, 2010 9:19 AM



EU's "Green" Protectionism Case Study

By [Alan Oxley](#)

Congratulations to the President for recognizing that dramatic expansion of solar and wind would cost the floundering US economy dearly; and not just by squandering taxpayers dollars.

The public may be surprised to learn that another set of interest groups, uncompetitive businesses and labor unions, are also weighing in -- attempting to leverage these climate change policies in order to raise trade barriers.

For instance, the House cap and trade bill passed last summer provides for carbon tariffs to limit imports from countries which do not restrict greenhouse gas emissions. The most likely targets - steel, cement, paper, chemicals, and aluminum -- include products that are already favorite and frequent targets for businesses and labor unions seeking special trade barriers against competition.

This new wave of protectionism, "green" protectionism, threatens to spark an international trade war that would...

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FEBRUARY 12, 2010 12:37 PM



Focus on Better Products, Not Handouts

By [Thomas J. Pyle](#)

President, Institute for Energy Research (IER)

3

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Right now, there is no way for renewables to become the top energy source. To get there, wind and solar companies should transfer their focus on increasing the government subsidies and handouts they use to sustain their industry and instead focus on making their products more efficient and less expensive so that they can compete in the marketplace. After all, government subsidies will someday end, and--unless something changes, quick--so too will the wind and solar industries.

The best way for Congress to balance emerging technologies with existing ones is through a hand-off approach. If Congress, or any of the rest of us, knew which technologies will power the future, we would have invested in and created that technology by now. But no one, not Congress, not me, not the experts on this blog, knows which technologies with "win" and produce efficient, inexpensive energy in the future.

The best thing the President could do in the energy arena is to eliminate -- not expand -- subsidies for all energy sources. It is time for...

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FEBRUARY 10, 2010 8:41 PM



Steady investment, level playing field

By [Jan Mueller](#)

Senior Policy Associate, Environmental and Energy Study Institute

5

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For clean energy, focus on stable policies, sustained investment, and a level playing field--American innovation will do the rest.

Three fundamental principles need to guide America's energy strategy,

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particularly as it relates to renewables.

Focus on efficiency

Efficiency is job # 1. Whether we are talking renewables, fossil fuels, or nuclear, to outcompete other countries and stop giving our energy dollars to OPEC, America can't afford to waste energy anymore. Our economy uses approximately 25-70 percent more energy per dollar of GDP than other industrial nations like Japan and Germany--which means we would be a whole lot wealthier if we were as energy efficient as they are.

In the past, we dominated the global economy through the sheer "shock and awe" size of our economy, but the world has changed and emerging countries like China, India, and Brazil, along with other industrial nations are jockeying for the same energy resources. Studies by DOE, McKinsey Company, and others suggest we could reduc...

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FEBRUARY 10, 2010 7:15 PM



Phase Out Coal for Renewables

By [Bill Snape](#)

Senior Counsel, Center For Biological Diversity

2

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In the movie of Field of Dreams, the central refrain is "if you build it, they will come," prompting the fictional characters to take the leap of faith and build a baseball diamond in the middle of a farm field. With global warming, the leap of faith is far shorter and the stakes much higher (no offense to Shoeless Joe Jackson). We know that climate change, if unabated, will cause and is now causing incredible suffering to humans and the natural world. We also know that a handful of pollutants --

carbon dioxide, methane, black carbon, HFCs, and ozone precursors among others -- are causing this damaging climate change. And we also know that renewable forms of energy -- most notably solar, wind and geothermal -- can immediately and feasibly provide significant energy production in the U.S. and around the world. What we have yet to build is the political will to end the addiction to cheap coal, gas and other damaging fuels. Once the true cost of those damaging fossil fuels is incorporated, renewable forms of energy will follow in a very cost-effective manner. In other words, if we build the legal mechanisms to phase out coal, renewables will come.

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FEBRUARY 10, 2010 5:28 PM



Federal RES Needed

By [Amy Harder](#)

The following comments are from Tom Carnahan, founder and President of Wind Capital Group:

2

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Wind power is now a mainstream source of energy in the United States with a vast potential for growth in the future. Last year alone, more than 10,000 megawatts of wind energy was installed in the US -- that's enough to power more than 2 million homes. Our company, Wind Capital Group, is currently developing wind energy projects in over a dozen states across the United States. And as the President of a company that has seen rapid growth over

the past few years developing wind energy, I know that wind is no longer an alternative but an integral part of our energy supply that also includes natural gas, coal, nuclear, and other renewables such as solar and geothermal.

Although perhaps not quite as steeply, all projections show that demand for electricity will continue to increase substantially both domestically and around the world, so Congress needs to take action today on specific measures promoting the development of wind and other renewable sources of en...

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Rollercoaster Policies Undercut Growth

By **Amy Harder**

Karl Gawell, Executive Director of the Geothermal Energy Association, submitting the following comments:

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Before we jump to a new strategy, let's take stock of where we are today. All renewable technologies are seeing significant growth in the marketplace, which is a real testament to the state and federal policies already in place, or at least put in place over the last ten years. Together, state renewable energy standards have ensured a growing market for renewable power, and federal tax incentives have lured new investors and helped buy down the

first-cost of renewable technologies. This has been a winning strategy that combines a reliance on the power of the marketplace with effective federal and state support.

For all of the renewable technologies, there is substantial untapped capacity that does not involve big technological breakthroughs. There are tens of thousands of megawatts of wind, solar, geothermal, hydropower and biomass power – and that's for each -- meaning together renewable power technologies are poised to make a very substanti...

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FEBRUARY 10, 2010 10:32 AM



Efficiency, invention and ideas

By **Paul Sullivan**

Professor of Economics, National Defense University

7

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We still remain a hydrocarbon economy. About 85% of our energy comes from oil, natural gas and coal. Over 50% of our electricity comes from coal-fired electricity plants.

The President is being practical in his focus on clean coal technology, nuclear and the like. He and the better people on his staff know that we cannot transition quickly to a renewable energy future so we need to look at some practical solutions to the problems we face with the energy

systems we have today. We have massive reserves of coal in the US. It would be entirely unwise to neglect the potential that we have in this fuel source. But it would also be unwise to neglect the serious environmental, health and other effects of using coal.

Let's not kid ourselves many times more people have had health problems or died from the use of coal than the use of nuclear. The nuclear industry is in fact the safest source of any of our major sources of energy. Nuclear produces about 8% of all of our energy.

Renewable energy sources, mostly hydropower, are about 7% of our energy sources.

Solar is about .0...

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FEBRUARY 9, 2010 9:20 PM



Wind has a winning strategy: Jobs

By **Denise Bode**

CEO, American Wind Energy Association

1

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Wind has now accounted for over 40% of new electricity generation for two years running. Along with natural gas, wind was the largest source of new capacity added in the U.S. in 2009. I would say that we are well on our way to positioning ourselves to becoming 20% of capacity by 2030 as was predicted in a 2008 report produced by the Department of Energy—if the right policies are now put in place. Wind is cost-effective, plentiful, and has no environmental impact.

Wind power also supports a wide range of jobs, especially in the manufacturing sector. The wind industry is well on its way to creating an explosion of new jobs depending on when Congress makes a long-term commitment to renewable growth by passing a strong Renewable Electricity Standard. A national Renewable Electricity Standard will provide the market and policy certainty that is still needed in the U.S. and will ensure that we compete in attracting investment, build up our manufacturing base, and create jobs here in the U.S.

We also need the right policies to meet global competition. We have ...

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FEBRUARY 8, 2010 7:54 PM



Renewables Need To Be Top of Mind

By [Gary Fazzino](#)

2

agree

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I submit that many renewable sources of energy are already positioning themselves as top energy sources utilizing existing technologies. For example, over the last several years, wind energy has represented a significant share of new electric generation additions and solar is poised to break out in similar fashion.

What both wind and solar have in common is that they represent manufactured energy, as they rely on the availability of increasingly sophisticated collection and conversion equipment to transform these

naturally occurring but diffuse energy sources into concentrated energy sources such as electricity and fuels.

Both industries also rely on scale of production to drive down costs. The solar photovoltaics (PV) industry, in particular, is transitioning from a sector of component assembly operations to large-scale manufacturing. New market entrants are bringing capital, technology and manufacturing experience from established and successful industries, such as semiconductor and display, which will dramatically increase scale, automation and through...

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FEBRUARY 8, 2010 3:23 PM



Renewables Alone Can't Renew Economy

By [Margo Thorning](#)

Chief Economist, American Council for Capital Formation

4

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Renewables like wind, solar and biomass can certainly play a complementary role in U.S. energy supply, but because of their cost, the intermittency of wind and solar, (the sun doesn't always shine and the wind doesn't always blow) and need for a backup energy supplies it is foolish to think that they will replace large amounts of our more traditional energy sources in the next 10 to 20 years.

Because each one percent increase in U.S. GDP growth is accompanied by a 0.2 percent increase in energy use, we are going to require every source of energy available to us to as we emerge from the current economic slump. Greater reliance on higher priced energy sources like wind and solar energy would slow the rate of economic recovery. This would be further exacerbated by President Obama's proposed higher taxes on domestic oil and gas firms. These taxes would reduce our ability to develop reserves and increase production and will increase our reliance on foreign energy supplies..

The main reasons renewables have been booming is because they already receive the l...

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FEBRUARY 8, 2010 8:43 AM



Don't Follow The Yellow Brick Road

By [William O'Keefe](#)

CEO, George C. Marshall Institute

3

agree

The current promise of renewables is founded in fantasy: a glittering yellow brick road that leads to nowhere. This is a harsh indictment but also an accurate one. Unless we adopt a different energy strategy for renewables, their potential will continue to be delayed. And tax dollars will continue to

Submit

be wasted on rent-seekers.

Over the past few decades, advocates of renewables -- primarily wind and solar -- have predicted they could soon provide 20% or more of our energy needs if only the government (ie taxpayers) gave them a helping hand. Washington has acquiesced. And all we have to show for this heaping helping of pork is energy production that meets a mere 2% of our electric power needs. EIA projects that by 2035, with continued government handouts, non liquid renewables will still only provide 4% of our power needs.

An assessment of energy systems published in the respected journal Science concluded, "All renewables suffer from low...power densities...are intermittent dispers...

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FEBRUARY 8, 2010 8:40 AM



U.S. Not Serious About Renewables

By [Lewis Hay](#)

8

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As the CEO of America's largest provider of renewable energy, I obviously have a bias on this topic, but in my view we are simply not serious about building a robust renewable energy industry in the United States.

In 2009, the federal government provided \$1.5 billion in tax credits to wind power developers. More than \$1 billion went to firms headquartered in Europe. Now, it does not trouble me that European firms are earning U.S. tax credits. They are playing by the rules, and their investments are helping to create jobs here in the United States, just as intended. What

troubles me is the lack of urgency on the part of U.S. policymakers in ensuring that America remains competitive in the renewable energy sector.

Unlike the United States, Europe started down the path toward renewable energy in earnest many years ago. Over the past decade, European firms have acquired critical expertise in the renewables business and are now formidable competitors. They got a jump start in their home markets -- Spain, Portugal, France and Germany -- and have exported this know-...

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