

Editorial: Clean energy is becoming cost effective

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Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

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By The Florida Times-Union (Jacksonville)

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There is a myth that solar energy is commonplace only because it is being subsidized by the federal government.

But government subsidies are commonplace in the energy industry, period.

Nuclear power is subsidized; the government allows utilities to begin charging for it long before the actual power is delivered.

Fossil fuels have been subsidized for so long that it's been taken for granted; indeed, President Donald Trump's administration is subsidizing the coal industry even though natural gas is a more economical and cleaner energy source.

A recent article in Vox describes the fossil fuel subsidies – \$20 billion annually in direct production benefits like cheap leases to mine coal on public land. And that doesn't even count the \$14.5 billion in consumption subsidies for fossil fuels.

That's far more than the subsidies provided for renewable energy like solar and wind; in terms of tax breaks, fossil fuel subsidies outpace renewable subsidies by 7 to 1.

It all comes down to politics.

During the 2015-16 election cycle, fossil fuel companies spent \$354 million on campaign funding and lobbying. In return, these companies received \$29 billion in federal subsidies – an 8,000 percent return on their investment.

The knock against solar power is that it doesn't generate energy on cloudy days or during the nighttime. But when you factor in how solar energy can be stored – and in an economical manner – you start to understand why solar has become an attractive, competitive energy source.

In fact, the United States is about five years ahead of the world in solar energy storage, according to an article in Greentech Media; it states that the hybrid solar storage market is “set to take off this year.”

The emergence of solar power has led to a drop in battery prices. It has also created an appetite for constant innovation in battery technology: one U.S. company, according to the New York Times, has announced the development of a rechargeable battery that runs on zinc and air.

The trend is clear: Clean energy is becoming cost-effective energy. And solar power is proving to be both clean and efficient.

To their credit, many fossil fuel-driven energy companies have begun to accept the new realities. Occidental, Chevron and ExxonMobil have entered into a voluntary effort that has committed \$1 billion toward reducing emissions like methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

Occidental is researching the injection of carbon dioxide into oil wells; that's a win-win approach, reports Time magazine, because it would remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere while extending the lifespans of oil wells.

A certain amount of impact from a warming planet is already underway; scientists don't know the extent of it. A 500-page environmental impact statement from the Trump administration, however, has estimated that the Earth will be a startling 7

degrees Fahrenheit warmer by 2100.

The bottom line is this: a hotter planet is already on the way. Our leaders must start preparing to mitigate the impact – it's simply the responsible and pragmatic thing to do.