

Life beyond the dinosaurs

Eliminating fossil fuels would risk a descent into darkness

Inventiveness plus boldness equals progress. Liberal “activists” who want to revolutionize the nation’s energy resources demonstrate political moxie, but if their campaign to substitute renewable sources for fossil fuels — oil and gas — succeeds it will take more than happy thoughts to keep the lights on.

Michael Bloomberg, the billionaire former mayor of New York City, pledges to donate \$500 million to a campaign to shutter the nation’s remaining coal-fired power plants by 2030. The billionaire told the Class of ’19 at Massachusetts Institute of Technology the other day that his Bloomberg Philanthropies, in partnership with the Sierra Club, played a role in closing 289 coal-fired plants — half of the nation’s existing power plants — since 2011. He says he’ll try to pull the plug on the rest, all to save the planet from the changing climate.

“Building on the success of the Beyond Coal campaign, I’m committing \$500 million to launch @ BeyondCarbon the largest-ever coordinated campaign to tackle the worst climate crisis our country has ever seen, Mr. Bloomberg tweeted last week. “This is the fight of our time.” The money will be spent primarily on funding environmental organizations adept at lobbying government officials to go “green.” He aims to take out clean-burning natural gas power plants as well. “By the time they are built, they’ll be out of date because renewable will be cheaper,” he told the graduates.

The sometime Democrat joins other party notables in their quixotic crusade to rid the world of fossil fuels, thus avoiding the combustion that climate alarmists contend produces global warming. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s \$30 trillion Green New Deal, Joe Biden’s \$5 trillion Clean Energy Revolution, Jay Inslee’s \$3 trillion Global Climate Mobilization dream of a world powered by windmills, solar panels and other carbon-free technologies, all in hopes of preventing the thermometer from rising a fraction of a degree by the year 2100.

You don’t need a degree in advanced mathematics from MIT to see that the numbers don’t add up. Despite a generation of obsession with climate issues, most U.S. electricity is still generated by fossil fuels. Natural gas produces 35.1 percent of the kilowattage, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, and coal is responsible for 27.4 percent.

In contrast, all the sunshine, windmills and waterwheels that climate fanatics are banking on to keep wheels of progress turning, generate only 17.1 percent of the nation’s electricity. About 7 percent comes from water over the dams. Wind and solar contribute 6.6 percent and 1.6 percent. The fossils generate the rest.

If fossil-fuel power plants are to go the way of the clipper ships over the next decade, something must replace them. Going solely solar would require installing solar panels over an area of land nearly the size of West Virginia. Generating just 20 percent of U.S. energy needs from wind would require mounting turbines on an area encompassing land the size of New Hampshire and Vermont. About 900 hydroelectric plants were demolished between 1990 and 2015 owing to opposition from environmentalists outraged by harm to fish ecosystems. Nuclear plants would get similarly rough treatment at the hands of fanatics frightened by the prospect of nuclear power.

Solar and wind power flit across the landscape intermittently, requiring an alternate source, like coal or gas, to make electricity when nature takes a break. Environmentally friendly Europeans find that a lack of reliable backup when nature takes that break increases the risk of electrical grid failures. German engineering, as good as it is, has not been able to eliminate the effect of “green” politics, which would replace fossil and nuclear power with renewables. The result is 172,000 localized blackouts in Germany in 2017.

Poverty was a constant companion of humanity until modern times. The proportion of people worldwide living in poverty was cut in half between 1990 and 2010, according to the World Bank, an achievement unprecedented in human history. It was the result of a rapid boost in global energy production — up 43 percent during that period, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Nearly 81 percent of that power was generated by fossil fuels, such as oil and gas.

A billion people around the globe still suffer extreme energy poverty, with no access to electricity. Everyone gets a hint of what that means when storms knock out the power, and everything in the house stops. Fumbling occasionally for candles is a mere inconvenience, but life beyond carbon — entirely dependent on sunshine and a breeze — would be insanity.

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