The Great ‘Zero-Carbon Renewables’ Deception

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Simple narratives are employed to seduce a populace, and none is more seductive today than the promise of “carbon-free” energy. In California, a state often touted as a green pioneer, Gov. Gavin Newsom celebrated an “achievement” whose announcement was free of nuance and deficient of truth.

“Two-thirds of California’s power now comes from renewable and zero-carbon electricity generation,” he said as if announcing an earthshaking milestone. This declaration, however, was a master class in deception.

Newsom glosses over critical distinctions: First, the term should be carbon dioxide-free, not carbon-free because the objective of the climate-obsessed is eliminating emissions of CO_2 from human activity. Carbon, which evokes images of black soot, and carbon dioxide, an invisible, beneficial gas, are different molecules with their own chemical properties.
And there is nothing renewable about Earth’s finite stores of metals, minerals and fuels necessary for making “green” energy’s equipment and infrastructure.

Also, wind and solar systems, the darlings of California’s energy policy, may not emit carbon dioxide while generating electricity. However, their production, transportation, installation, maintenance and disposal are energy-intensive and emit copious amounts of carbon dioxide, as does virtually every other industrial enterprise.

Copper for wiring and electricity transmission lines is mined and smelted using fossil fuels. Transport and installation of these systems require diesel-powered trucks and other heavy machinery. Batteries used to back up intermittent wind and solar systems require lithium, cobalt and nickel, all mined with the support of internal combustion engines and often by ethically questionable methods.

The steel of the modern wind turbine and of the massive pillars supporting them are forged in coal-based blast furnaces. The gigantic blades are made of fiberglass and resins with heat and feedstock derived from petroleum. Foundations for these behemoths require vast quantities of cement whose manufacture releases significant quantities of CO_2.
China produces over 80% of the world’s polysilicon that make up solar panels. Polysilicon is often made close to coal-fired power plants because the manufacturing process requires so much energy. So, when a Chinese solar panel is installed in a California desert, it arrives with a massive carbon debt. Solar panel users, in effect, export their carbon emissions to China while patting themselves on the back for their green virtue.

Although direct imports from China to U.S. have been reduced to insignificant levels due to U.S. tariffs on Chinese solar modules, Chinese-linked firms have simply moved their operations to Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia.

These nations – and more than 131 solar producers there – now account for over 80% of all solar modules imported into the U.S. It is likely that four in five solar modules installed in the U.S. come from Chinese-affiliated firms in southeast Asia, which depend on carbon-intensive energy sources.

No honest engineer – or careful speaker – would call wind and solar "carbon-free."

The cost of this green facade is a burden that California's politicians refuse to acknowledge. California consistently ranks among the top five U.S. states for highest residential electricity prices. As of 2025, the average Californian pays over 30 cents per kilowatt-hour – nearly double the national average. Other areas served by grids with a significant presence of wind and solar suffer from high prices as well.

Claims that these "green" technologies are cheap are supported by a pricing calculation that does not count the costs of expensive backup power and the technical complexities they introduce to power systems. Consumers pay for the enormous costs of subsidies, infrastructure upgrades, storage systems and alternative generation for windless and sunless periods.

California also has been plagued by power outages and grid emergencies, especially during periods of high demand. Grid operators have had to issue repeated alerts, entreating residents to reduce electricity consumption to avoid rolling blackouts.

The state's so-called green leadership is supported by the deceptive advertisement of "zero-carbon" and false claims of low costs that ignore life-cycle environmental effects and the billions of dollars paid to compensate for the technical shortcomings of wind and solar.

Every steel beam, copper coil, and polysilicon wafer tell the real story: Fossil fuels are still the backbone of modern electricity – even in so-called renewable systems that cannot perform independently of them.

Announcements about "clean energy" are just smoke and mirrors backlit by the glow of a coal-fired furnace in Asia and paid for by overcharged consumers.

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