

Fossil Fuels vs. Renewables: ALL Forms of Energy are “Intermittent”

On May 8, my wife and I pulled into a local gas station and filled the family car’s tank. It wasn’t intended as a smart move, nor did it result from a premonition. It was just dumb luck. Within 24 hours, we were driving past gas stations with yellow plastic bags over the pump handles and “no gas” signs at the lot entrances.

On May 7 — although they didn’t bother to tell us until a day later — Colonial Pipeline shut down 5,500 miles of pipeline, which normally carries almost half the gas sold on the US east coast, due to a cyberattack. On the evening of May 9, to take the edge off, the Biden administration declared an emergency covering 17 states, lifting restrictions on delivering gasoline by truck. No word on when the pipeline will resume operation.

For the last few years, as the price of electricity produced by sunlight and wind power has continued to drop, fossil fuel flacks have insistently informed us that the problem with solar and wind power are that they’re “intermittent and incapable of meeting our needs” (as Ron Stein puts it in *Natural Gas Now*, an online publication put out by, surprise, the natural gas lobby).

Well, they’re right to a degree: The sun only shines so many hours a day, and we can have cloudy days; the wind isn’t always blowing at sufficient speeds to turn turbines.

What we really need, they say, is reliable old coal, oil, and natural gas.

The fossil fuel advocates either ignore or minimize the progress of a third technology: Large battery storage capacity. We’re getting better and better at generating the electricity when conditions are good, then delivering that electricity to your home (or from a home battery rig) when it’s needed.

Another thing the fossil fuel advocates ignore is just how vulnerable fossil fuels are to intermittency due to long and not always reliable supply chains. Pipeline or drilling rig accidents or attacks. Labor conflicts. Derailed trains or wrecked trucks. Suez Canal blockages. Wars, or warlike political embargoes or blockades.

“Intermittency” isn’t the only complaint we hear from the fossil fuel lobby, of course. They also like to complain about government subsidies to renewable energy sources like wind and solar.

I’m with them on that. But the thing is, they’re not with themselves on that.

Fossil fuels are by far the most government-subsidized energy form on Earth — everything

from “steal that land via eminent domain so we can run a pipeline over it,” to “hey, could you pretty please send the US Navy out to secure our tanker routes, take out a competitor, or scare a stubborn supplier?”

Then they throw a hissy if a renewable energy competitor gets special tax treatment on a new solar panel factory.

Coal, oil, maybe even natural gas are on their way out, even with the massive subsidies they’ve enjoyed for more than a century. Withdraw the subsidies — all of them, to everyone — and the market will likely make even shorter work of fossil fuels.