



WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THE GREEN NEW DEAL?

ALEX EPSTEIN

We face an existential threat. Life as we know it is on the line. We have 12 short years to change everything or it's game over.

This is the terrifying scenario that's used by many leading politicians to justify a "Green New Deal": an unprecedented increase in government power focused on the energy industry.

The core idea of a Green New Deal is that government should rapidly prohibit the use of fossil fuel energy and impose "100% renewable energy," mostly solar and wind.

This may sound appealing, but consider what it would entail.

Today, 80% of the energy Americans use to heat their homes, farm their land, run their factories, and drive their cars comes from fossil fuels: coal, oil, and natural gas. Only 3.4% comes from solar and wind—despite decades of government subsidies and mandates to encourage their use.

The reason we don't use much sunlight and wind as energy is that they are unreliable fuels that only work when the sun shines and the wind blows. That's why no town, city, or country has ever come close to 100%—or even 50%—solar and wind.

And yet, Green New Deal proponents say they can do the impossible—if only we give the government control of the energy industry and control of major users of energy, such as the transportation industry, manufacturing, and agriculture.

All of this is justified by the need to "do something" about the "existential threat" of rising CO2 levels. We're told on a daily basis that prestigious organizations like the United Nations have predicted mass destruction and death if we don't get off fossil fuels. What we're *not* told is that such predictions have a decades-long track record of getting it wrong—and by wrong, I mean completely-missing-the-dart-board wrong.

For example, in 1989, the Associated Press reported a United Nations prediction that "entire nations could be wiped off the face of the earth by rising sea levels if the global warming trend is not reversed by the year 2000." We're now two decades past 2000, we're not missing any nations, and human beings are living longer, healthier, and wealthier lives than ever before.

But aren't things bound to get worse? Haven't scientists established that CO2 is a greenhouse gas with a warming influence on the planet? Yes—but that's only a small part of the big picture.

Although CO₂ causes some warming, it's much less significant than we've been told. Since we started using significant amounts of fossil fuels in the middle of the 19th century, we've increased the percentage of CO₂ in the atmosphere from .03% to .04%, which correlates with an average temperature increase of about 2 degrees Fahrenheit. It also correlates with significant global greening—because CO₂ is plant food.

All of this is far from unprecedented territory for our planet, which has existed with at least 10 times today's CO₂ levels and a 25-degree warmer average temperature.

What is truly unprecedented, though, is how safe we are from climate. The International Disaster Database, a nonpartisan organization that tracks deaths from climate-related causes—such as extreme heat, floods, storms, and drought—shows that such deaths have been plummeting as CO₂ emissions have been rising.

How is this possible? Because of the fossil fuel energy that emitted the CO₂, which has empowered us to climate-proof our environment with heating, air-conditioning, sturdy buildings, mass irrigation, and weather warning systems.

Fossil fuel energy has not taken a naturally safe climate and made it unnaturally dangerous; it's taken our naturally dangerous climate and made it unnaturally safe. Fossil fuels are not an existential threat. They are an existential resource because they increase something much more important than the level of CO₂ in the atmosphere: the level of human empowerment. Increased life expectancy, income, health, leisure time, and education are all tightly linked to increased access to fossil fuels.

Does this mean that we shouldn't look for lower carbon energy alternatives? Of course not. But the alternatives should lead us toward more abundant, more reliable power, not less.

The most promising form of alternative energy is not unreliable solar and wind, but reliable, carbon-free nuclear energy. Sweden gets 40% of its electricity from nuclear. France, over 70%. While nuclear energy is smeared as unsafe, it has actually been demonstrated by study after study to be the safest form of energy ever created.

And yet, Green New Deal proponents, who say that we have 12 years to save the planet from rising CO₂ levels, vigorously oppose nuclear—in addition to all fossil-fuel use.

By opposing every affordable, abundant, reliable form of energy, the Green New Deal won't protect us from an existential threat; it *is* an existential threat.

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