

# Roth: Counterintuitive renewable energy progress

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## Counterintuitive renewable energy progress

I have often said renewables are here to stay, in spite of some resistance from some corners of our economy.

Case in point, countries around the globe are investing in and developing renewable forms of energy in places that wouldn't be that obvious. For instance, last year in the U.S., we installed more than 14.73 gigawatts of solar, while China installed more than twice that at 34.54 gigawatts.

While the technology for solar panels was created in the U.S., China's embrace of the solar industry changed the economics. New research indicates that years of cheap Chinese solar panels dropped prices around the globe by 80 percent. China also dominates other industries the U.S. once led, currently surpassing us in the production of steel, automobiles, and cotton. China also leads the way in pollution as well as coal production at almost 4 billion short tons, compared to the United States' 728 million short tons in 2016. It's not all bad for the U.S. that China leads the way in solar; after all, the cheaper panels afforded the addition of hundreds of thousands of domestic solar installation jobs here in America.

But, there is more to this story. Renewable energy is being developed in other unexpected places.

In Saudi Arabia, the new crown prince and his energy minister are looking to diversify and grow the economy by maximizing the country's vast sunlight. One example of this is a solar farm covering a massive parking lot at Saudi Aramco, the national oil company. For Saudi Arabia's economy, oil has long been the kingpin – citizens get 50 percent of their electricity by burning oil.

But with new leadership (sometimes) comes new ideas, and the new goal is to install 41 gigawatts of solar by 2032. Questions about whether the plan will be implemented still remain. The benefits to the country include the price – with government-backing for projects, the energy will be cheaper than fossil fuels, and, with more citizens using renewables for their domestic energy needs, more Saudi oil is available for export.

These efforts won't help China's solar industry much; the bidding process requires the selected company to spend around 30 percent of total costs on domestic suppliers. A sort of "Arabia First" requirement.

Three other countries whose level of renewables might come as a bit of a surprise are Nicaragua, with plans to be powered by 90 percent renewables by 2020. Costa Rica, slightly more assertive than Nicaragua, aims to be completely carbon-neutral by 2021. And Uruguay, maybe the most impressive, is running on 95 percent renewables with only 10 years of effort, and all without subsidies or raising consumer costs.

These countries have geothermal, hydroelectric, solar, and wind – hey, not unlike Oklahoma and its own diverse resources. But Nicaragua and Costa Rica have two things our state does not: volcanoes, which provide for vast geothermal energy, and government leaders who support the development of renewable technologies.

While we won't have volcanoes anytime soon, we could stand to have more support to develop the many energy blessings found in our state. A sort of "Oklahoma First" energy policy, if you will.

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