Three decades of renewable energy progress

Two years ago, only one state had committed to 100 percent clean energy. A year ago, there were two. As of this writing there are now six. More and more elected officials and business leaders are setting ambitious renewable energy goals, and the momentum is building. Here’s a big-picture look at renewable energy’s progress from Rob Sargent, senior director of our national network’s 100% Renewable Energy campaign.

I’ve been campaigning to move America to clean energy for many years. When I started three decades ago, renewable energy wasn’t even a blip on the radar screen.

There were no commercially produced hybrid cars—let alone plug-in electrics. The debates about energy efficiency revolved around whether to do it rather than how much needed to be done.

Back then, people would have laughed at the idea that America could meet its energy needs with 100 percent renewable energy. But, thankfully, we and others persisted.

Renewables are on the rise

Fast forward to 2019. Wind and solar are the fastest growing energy sources and have become “go-to” energy options for governments, corporations and institutions. Thousands of electric cars are coming off almost every manufacturer’s assembly line. Energy efficiency is lauded as a sensible business practice and talk of zero-net-energy buildings has become commonplace. Today, more businesses, schools, cities, counties and states than ever before have plans to meet their energy needs entirely with clean energy in the not-too-distant future. California, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, New Mexico, Washington, D.C., Washington state, Maine, and most recently, New York, have all set timelines for when they’ll be powered 100 percent by clean energy sources.

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Leaders of our national network’s canvass team met in Baltimore before spreading across the country to build public support for putting wildlife over waste by banning single-use plastics.

Six states in six months choose Wildlife Over Waste

In the first half of 2019 alone, six states took strong action to rein in plastic pollution, including Connecticut.

New York, Maine, Vermont, Connecticut and Oregon all banned single-use plastic bags, joining California, which banned them in 2016. Maine also became the first state to ban single-use polystyrene foam containers, and Maryland became the second a month later. Bags and polystyrene are seldom recycled. Instead, they often end up in our rivers and oceans, where they never fully degrade and pose a threat to wildlife for years to come.

“Our Wildlife Over Waste campaign is based on the principle that nothing we use for a few minutes should pollute our environment for centuries,” said Steve Blackledge, senior director of our national network’s Conservation program. “When we started this year, it was only California. Now it’s a movement.”

Our network’s staff were instrumental in winning the California ban, and campaigned for the laws in Maine, Connecticut, Oregon and Maryland.

All the way: Our best conservation program would be fully funded under bipartisan bill

The idea that Americans should enjoy more and better-maintained parks, wildlife refuges, hiking trails and ball fields is earning bipartisan support.

One June 11, Reps. Jeff Van Drew (N.J.), Brian Fitzpatrick (Penn.) and Paul Grijalva (Ariz.) introduced a bill to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Republican Reps. John Katko and Lee Zeldin of New York, as well as several dozen Democrats, signed on as cosponsors. The Senate is considering a similar bill, introduced by Sens. Cory Gardner (Colo.) and Joe Manchin (W. Va.).

“LWCF is slated to receive $900 million per year, but, for decades, that money has been diverted to other programs,” said Erik Dumont, public lands advocate for our national network. “Congress needs to pass these bills to finally, fully fund LWCF.”

Our national network helped lead the effort to reauthorize LWCF after the last Congress let it expire. Overwhelming, bipartisan majorities in both houses voted to restore it.

Battle over Connecticut’s bottle bill highlighted in The New York Times

If big beverage companies say they support recycling, and states with “bottle bills” have significantly higher recycling rates than those without, why doesn’t the industry support bottle bills in every state?

Good question. A July 5 New York Times article described repeated attempts to expand Connecticut’s bottle bill, all of which have been stymied by beverage industry opposition. In June, for example, industry lobbying helped defeat a bill that would have expanded deposits beyond the current beer and soda to juice and energy drinks.

“It’s like Groundhog Day all over again,” said Chris Phelps, state director of Environment Connecticut. “Every year, no progress is made, despite a lot of effort, a lot of work, a lot of recognition of the need to make progress.”

With recycling rates low across the country, the beverage industry should put its financial and political clout where its rhetoric is, and support pro-recycling policies like the bottle bill.

Toward a greener future

Support our work to build a cleaner, greener, healthier future by including a gift to Environment Connecticut or Environment Connecticut Research & Policy Center in your will, trust or retirement accounts.

For more information call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: PlannedGiving@EnvironmentConnecticut.org

Get more updates on our work online at https://environmentconnecticut.org.
There’s no time to waste

This progress has arrived not a moment too soon. It’s never been clearer that we need rapid transformation in how we use and produce energy.

Decades of dirty energy practices have polluted our air, water and land, changing our climate even faster than we thought. Across the country, we’re facing extreme weather, dirty air and water, and other challenges caused by a polluted planet—challenges that will only get more severe in the coming years.

It’s no wonder there’s widespread support behind the idea of fueling our society with abundant, pollution-free and renewable energy sources that have no fuel costs. What’s not to like about that?

How we got here

The progress we’ve seen so far didn’t happen by accident. In the decades that I’ve been doing this work, many of us have pushed for strong policies to ramp up renewable energy usage, create cleaner cars and build more efficient buildings and appliances.

Now, due to growing recognition of the environmental and economic benefits of clean energy, many companies, governments and institutions are leaning into 100 percent renewable energy targets and have concrete plans for achieving them.

We can’t change the past. But we can take stock of where we are today and forge ahead, guided by the reality of where we need to be in the future and what it will take to get there.

After years of slogging through the policy muck, I’m finally seeing the kind of progress that gives me confidence we can take clean energy to the next level. Let’s aim high. Please join us. The future of the planet is at stake.

By Rob Sargent, senior director, Campaign for 100% Renewable Energy

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To learn more about how renewable energy has grown in America, see “Renewables on the Rise,” a report by our national research partner Environment America Research & Policy Center. Read the report at: http://bit.ly/renewables-on-the-rise

Since September, Govs. Janet Mills of Maine, Michelle Lujan Grisham of New Mexico, and then-Gov. Jerry Brown of California all have signed bills committing their states to 100% clean energy.

Thank you so much for joining us as we work to make our state—and our world—a greener, healthier and more sustainable place for all of us to live in. In these pages, you’ll find the stories of the works you made possible to bring us closer to that goal.

So thank you once again for making it all possible with your action and support.

Chris Phelps
State Director

Page 1 story continued:
Some good news for bees: EPA bans 12 bee-killing pesticides

On May 20, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) canceled the registration of a dozen neonicotinoid-based pesticides known to harm bees—effectively banning them.

The cancellation came as part of a settlement agreement the EPA reached in December in a lawsuit brought by the Center for Food Safety. While many forms of neonic pesticides will remain on the market, the settlement also requires the EPA to examine the effects of all neonics on endangered species.

“The lawsuit and the EPA’s decision recognize the linkage between neonic pesticides and bee die-offs,” said Steve Blackledge, senior director of our national network’s Conservation program. “Pulling 12 of these pesticides off the shelves should create a buzz about what still needs to be done.

Connecticut and Maryland have already restricted these pesticides, and we need other states to prohibit the most common and problematic uses of all neonics.”

To that end, our No Bees, No Food campaign is calling on the public to urge lawmakers across the country to restrict bee-killing pesticides.