

Top Ten in 2020 TW Beck

By Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

It is easy to look at 2020 and see the downside: the EPA rollbacks, the struggling economy, food insecurity, record breaking wildfires, hurricanes, the divisive politics, and the pandemic. Let's begin 2021 looking at some bright spots from the past year.

1. Coal is on its way out. More than a dozen U.S. coal plant retirements have been announced. (Data compiled by GEM Global Energy Monitor) Global coal consumption went down in 2020.
2. Global Carbon Emissions were down by a record 7% (an estimated 2.4 billion metric tons) (<https://www.dw.com/en/global-carbon-emissions-down-by-record-7-in-2020/a-55900887>)
3. The percentage of jobs in green energy sectors has exceeded the number of jobs in fossil-fuel based energy sectors.
4. The cost of replacing fossil fuel consumption with sustainable energy solutions has dropped dramatically. According to the Rockefeller Foundation and Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), between the years 2010 and 2019 the price of Photovoltaic (PV) Panels fell by 82%, and the price of Lithium-Ion batteries fell by 85%. This means that the cost of building electric infrastructure and energy storage has become dramatically more affordable in the past decade.
5. There is bipartisan support for Carbon Dividend solutions to reducing our carbon footprint.
6. The Federal Reserve voted unanimously to join NGFS, an "international network of central banks and regulators devoted to fighting climate change through the global financial system" (<https://thehill.com/policy/finance/530263-fed-joins-global-network-to-fight-climate-change-through-financial-system>)
7. The U.S. will be back in Paris Agreement, joining most of the world in committing to a cleaner future. This will reflect the actions of states and localities across the U.S. which have committed to sustainable practices despite the outgoing administration's negative climate policies during the past 4 years.
8. China commits to Carbon Neutrality under the Paris agreement.
9. The S&P Global Clean Energy Index is up 37% over the last 2 years compared with 18% for the S&P 500.
10. In 2020 "a record 41 percent of drivers in the U.S. said they would consider purchasing a non-gas powered car, "up from 29% the previous year. (generation180.org and <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/news/deloitte-electric-vehicles-consumer-interest-rising-range-anxiety/569898>)

These are all encouraging developments and cause for optimism. But the severity of our climate crisis cannot be understated. As the two largest economies, the United States and China both need to be part of the solution. In the course of the next decade, we must double down on actions to save our planet.

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