

The World According to Bob Inglis

Former U.S. Representative (R-SC) Bob Inglis, now Executive Director of republicEn.org believes President Biden can find bipartisan support for spending on clean energy, providing an opportunity to ‘build back better.’

- Life has etched President-elect Joe Biden with empathy — empathy that gives him a shot at bringing America together, especially on climate change.
- The president-elect might have noticed that conservatives have been coming around on climate. It has been happening in the House and the Senate, where there are Republicans with a time horizon beyond Trumpism.
- Young conservatives of faith in congregations across America are ready to join with their progressive contemporaries in summoning the will to act. Talented staffs in EcoRight organizations are ready to step forward with solutions that fit with conservative values. Brave, card-carrying Republicans have spoken out even when speaking out was considered a heresy.
- The president should reach out to these people. They’re Americans who know that we’re in this together. They’re Americans who wish for our country to lead the world to solutions. They’re patriots who want the new administration to succeed.
- Climate change is upon us; we’re seeing the whites of its eyes now. We’ve got to take a shot, and it’s got to be a good shot. We’ve not a moment to spare, and yet we mustn’t rush. We must build consensus.
- Climate change probably helped Biden win. It has been a useful political wedge for Democrats for several cycles now. For the good of the world, they’ve got to drop the wedge. This is not a moment to continue to score points. This is a moment to bring us together.

Author Steve Melink Shares His View on Fusion Capitalism: A Clean Energy Vision For Conservatives

Steve Melink (www.melinkcorp.com) is the ForbesBooks author of *Fusion Capitalism: A Clean Energy Vision For Conservatives*, and founder/CEO of **Melink Corporation**, a Cincinnati, Ohio-based company considered a pioneer in renewable energy solutions for the commercial building industry. Melink’s company has worked with retail, restaurants, hotels chains, hospitals, nursing homes, universities, and supermarkets. Melink is a national speaker on sustainability, clean energy and zero-energy buildings, and he has consulted with federal and state legislators. He earned a BS in mechanical engineering from Vanderbilt University and an MBA from Duke University.

CCBJ: In the big picture, for the trajectory of clean energy in North America, do you see more growth in utility-scale power generation connected to the grid or distributed power generation — whether it’s residential or on commercial facilities or even larger institutional facilities not hooked up to the grid?

Steve Melink: Based on what I am seeing, it will be a race between utility-scale generation and distributed power generation. Utilities are finally understanding that clean energy generation, specifically solar power, at the building level is an existential threat to their fossil fuel central plant model of the past.

Large commercial and institutional building owners have the advantage of economies of scale when it comes to price per Watt over residential and so its growth will continue to outpace homeowners over the next 10 years. In my opinion, in order for the residential market to fully embrace solar power, the technology will have to evolve such that roof shingles and tiles become the collectors — much like the Tesla solar shingle. Modules are okay on the flat roofs of C&I facilities, but not on the exposed roofs of homes because of the aesthetics.

Solar and wind power will continue to dominate the renewable energy sector. The respective technologies will continue to be placed in geographic areas where it makes the most economic sense. For example, there will be more solar power deployed in markets where there is ample sunshine,

and more wind power deployed in markets where there is ample wind. And on a large national smart grid of the future, these sources can be very complementary.

CCBJ: For major corporations, how significant have their zero-carbon commitments been in the last couple years, and has that moved the needle for the private sector in North America and around the world?

Melink: Large corporations are playing a significant role in helping shift our country and the world to a clean energy economy. In the U.S. where climate change has unfortunately become a political hot potato, the fact that the business sector is stepping up and showing everyone that clean energy can save energy and money is effectively shifting the narrative from a problem to a solution. Moreover, these businesses are showing that the way to attract and retain customers and employees of the future is to be socially conscious. That is, brand leadership trumps stupid politics.

CCBJ: Do you believe that corporate commitments are more significant than national declarations? Can small businesses to follow suit?

Melink: I wouldn’t say that corporate commitments are more important than national and state declarations of zero-carbon commitments, but that they are adding to the ever-more compelling business case that clean energy is the way of

the future. Every government and business entity that leads by example is going to be more competitive than those that don't.

Small businesses will always lag large corporations in the same way that the residential market will always lag the C&I market. Often times it is a function of economies of scale, and other times a lack of long term vision. Large corporations naturally have more resources and plan further out. But as the cost of solar and other renewable energy options continue coming down, more small businesses will be able to enjoy the benefits.

CCBJ: Beyond not having lots of capital to invest in renewable power generation assets under their control, what other disadvantages do small businesses have in terms of the challenge of pursuing zero carbon or 100% renewable energy?

Melink: As mentioned, besides a lack of resources, small businesses often do not plan 5+ years out like large public companies. They are often just trying to survive today and tomorrow and hoping to be around next year. Their carbon footprint is not high on their radar screen, typically. But this can change with increased awareness of the damage that carbon is doing to our planet and the benefit of getting on the right side of history from a branding perspective. In the same way it is no longer socially acceptable to smoke cigarettes because of the effects of second-hand smoke on public health – it will become increasingly unacceptable to emit carbon into the atmosphere because of the effects of climate change on our global security, health, and economy.

CCBJ: What incentives are most meaningful for small businesses to make investments in renewable energy generation assets? Is there a divide between federal programs, state programs and city or county programs, and direct grants versus tax incentives?

Melink: The most important incentive is the 26% investment tax credit for solar power. This can be utilized by any small business owner anywhere in the country. And it is simple and easy to use. Accelerated depreciation is also a helpful financing tool. There is growing popularity in a financing tool called PACE or Property Accessed Clean Energy. The purpose is to view energy efficiency and renewable energy as an investment in a new or existing building such that the increased property value should demand an allowance for an assessment on its property taxes.

Thus, the improvement is paid for over 15, 20, or 25 years rather than, say, 5 years using a conventional bank loan. This also takes the investment off your balance sheet and puts it on the building where it belongs so that it does not affect your ability to borrow for working capital needs. I understand that over 30 states have adopted this innovative financing program to encourage more clean energy investments.

However, in my opinion, the most important next step our federal government can take to help make the U.S. the world leader in the coming Clean Energy Revolution is to put a price on carbon. This would send an immediate market signal to every sector, industry, and business in America that the indirect costs of fossil fuels on our society shall be paid for by those who produce and consume them.

No longer shall these costs – including those that negatively impact our security, health, economy, and environment, be absorbed by the public at large. The incentive to move our country and the world to a clean energy economy would accelerate and truly turn into the next industrial revolution – the greatest opportunity of the 21st Century. Ultimately we will expect that there will be many variables to determine the value of an ecosystem by the hectare. So categorical classifications with a specific value by type of Ecosystem is unlikely to be widely accepted. ⚙️

Volkswagen Places a Big Bet on Electric Vehicles

Volkswagen Group has initiated a remarkable transformation in the long wake of the emissions cheating scandal — a scandal of its own making where ‘defeat devices’ were programmed into diesel engine software to detect when they were being tested, and uncovered by the U.S. EPA in 2015. U.S. VW diesel cars on the road in the USA numbered 482,000, and VW later admitting cheating and put the number at 11 million cars worldwide, 8 million in Europe, where diesel had long been characterized as a socially beneficial fuel based on efficiency. ‘Dieselgate’ has reportedly cost VW more than €30 billion.

In the 2020s VW has embraced electric mobility with a series of major announcements. Since April 2018 VW has been headed by Herbert Diess, a former BMW manager, who initiated a radical shift towards battery-electric mobility. Diess’ strategic overhaul, presented in early 2019, silenced most critics. Europe’s federation of green mobility NGOs, **Transport & Environment**, called the VW announcement a game changer and executive director William Todts commented that “this is the first credible climate plan by a major automaker.” The **International Council on Clean Transportation’s** Drew Kodjak said it was “bigger, bolder, and far more detailed” than major rivals’ plans.

Volkswagen is “investing a total of €35 billion euros by 2025,” said an early 2021 VW press release. “By 2030, Volkswagen will launch around 70 pure e-models, of which around 20 have already started... By the end of the decade there will be around 60 hybrid vehicles in the product portfolio, of which just over half are already in production.” Since VW announced its plans, rivals have caught up, with Ford, GM, Volvo, and others also announcing an exit from the combustion engine (see table).

In March 2021, the Volkswagen brand doubled its 2030 target for the share of