



## Energy Sec Chu takes to Facebook to review *The Avengers* and simultaneously tout clean-energy ‘investment’

By Erika Johnsen

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I hadn't realized that Obama's cabinet members were joining in on the [Facebook fun](#), but they are really going full frontal assault on the messaging campaign. The *youths*, you know (emphasis mine):

I can rarely find the time to make it to the movies, but my staff is buzzing about *The Avengers*, which focuses on a new, limitless clean energy source called “The Tesseract.” In the film, there is evidently an intergalactic struggle to claim this new resource – one we can only win by relying on heroes like Captain America, Thor, Iron Man, Black Widow, and the Incredible Hulk. Naturally, the group includes a couple scientists!

While the “Tesseract” may be fictional, the real-life global competition over clean energy is growing increasingly intense, as countries around the world sense a huge economic opportunity AND the opportunity for cleaner air, water, and a healthier planet. This is now a \$260 billion global market, a sum that would impress even Tony Stark. According to the International Energy Agency, last year — for the first time — more money was invested worldwide in clean, renewable power plants than in fossil fuel power plants.

Given how big the opportunity is, and how fast it is growing, it is no surprise that 80 countries have adopted policies or incentives to capture a share of the clean energy market. The good news is that we have an advantage every bit as powerful as the Incredible Hulk: Americans' talent for entrepreneurship and innovation is unrivalled [sic] by any other country in the world. We have world-leading scientific facilities that would make Bruce Banner green with envy, and the investments we're making today in groundbreaking new technologies can help American businesses stay ahead of the curve.

Ultimately, however, the clean energy prize is still up for grabs and countries like China are competing aggressively. It's not enough for us to simply invent the technologies of the future, we need to actually build and deploy them here as well. As President Obama noted recently, one step Congress should take immediately is to renew the expiring tax credits for clean energy – a step that will create jobs and help American companies compete. **When it comes to clean energy, our motto should be: “Invented in America, Made in America, Sold Around the World.”**

Er, sorry, but drawing on themes from a popular fantastical superhero movie does not a coherent taxpayer-subsidized green-energy argument make. I can think of at least four different ways to

skin the cat here, but I'm just going to stick with one this time and take umbrage with Secretary Chu's last sentence.

The manufacture of many green energy technologies, solar panels and wind turbines included, requires rare earth elements. Although rare earth mineral deposits are actually relatively plentiful in the earth's crust, mining them can be both economically and environmentally costly. Regardless, there are plenty of American companies jockeying to fill the green-energy industry's (taxpayer-subsidized) demand for REEs — except that the federal government has strict holds on the industry with permits and regulations.

So from where, exactly, do we obtain the crucial elements we need to construct clean energy technologies? *[Just guess.](#)*

The U.S. could add jobs and strengthen national security by developing rare earth mining domestically and in other countries to break China's 97% monopoly on the global supply of these critical minerals, according to a [new report](#) from the [National Center for Policy Analysis \(NCPA\)](#).

Rare earth deposits exist all over the globe but China is the only country that is actively mining and exporting any significant amounts. Even so, China has both raised prices and cut back on export amounts, exacerbating both rare earth shortages and expenses for the U.S.

“The immediate challenge is getting access to alternate sources of rare earths,” said [NCPA Senior Fellow H. Sterling Burnett](#). “It takes the United States five times as long as other countries to get a permit and get a mine brought online. What takes two years in Canada takes more like ten years here due to restrictive regulation policies and differing jurisdictions for multiple agencies.”

That's right. The United States government touts American-made clean energy technology as a means to furthering energy independence and competing with countries like China... while withholding the necessary means to independently produce these clean technologies. Which we then purchase, from China, who enjoys a [practical monopoly](#) on the REE market. It all just smacks of “winning the future,” doesn't it?