Clearing the Air on Energy for The Golden State’s Future

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We all recognize the need for global carbon emission reductions. The good news is that the United States has been leading the way in slashing emissions, largely due to the accelerating replacement of coal with natural gas – a fossil fuel that burns 50 percent cleaner than coal – in electricity generation and the steady growth of renewable energy alternatives. California is the third largest consumer of transportation fuels in the world, right behind the United States and China.

As the nation’s third largest oil-producing state, we operate under the strictest environmental regulations in the nation, overseen not only by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency but by numerous state and local entities such as the California Air Resources Board (CARB), California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), Division of Oil, Gas & Geothermal Resources (DOGGR), and the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA), just to name a few. Under the regulatory oversight of these agencies, we produce right here in California, transportation and heating fuel with lower emissions than would result from importing oil from outside our borders to provide the energy to support the world’s sixth-largest economy.

Now, some advocate for the rapid elimination – by government fiat – of the use of the very fuels that enhance our quality of life and keep our California economy moving. It is challenging to describe in non-technical terms, and in limited space, why this goal is both unrealistic and unnecessary. But here are a few well-documented facts to put some of the more frequently repeated myths about oil and gas production into perspective:

**Myth # 1:** “Oil and natural gas extraction and products are insufficiently regulated and are dangerous to the environment and human health.”


Fact: Oil and gas have been safely produced in California for decades. We have the nation’s strictest state regulations governing oil and natural gas extraction and products, and the industry is also subject to numerous federal health and environmental laws such as the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and the Safe Drinking Water Act, for example.

Myth #2: "Oil extraction practices such as ‘fracking’ are contaminating our groundwater."

Fact: Numerous independent studies have concluded that oil and gas production does not put groundwater at risk, and well-respected environmental experts agree. The immediate past U.S. Secretary of Energy reported, “To my knowledge, I still have not seen any evidence of fracking per se contaminating groundwater.” And the immediate past U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator stated, “In no case have we made a definitive determination that [hydraulic fracturing] has caused chemicals to enter groundwater.” In California, regulations on well stimulation technologies require rigorous testing and evaluation before, during and after stimulation operations to ensure that wells and geologic formations remain competent, are sound, and that drinking water is not contaminated. [ref: http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dog/faqs]

Myth #3: "Oil production puts our air quality at risk."

Fact: California’s strictest-in-the-nation air quality rules, combined with continuing advances in technology and application of best practices are effectively safeguarding our air quality. A 2015 study by the California Council on Science and Technology found that in Los Angeles County - a densely populated region that is home to numerous motor vehicles and industrial facilities - less than one percent of toxic air contaminant emissions and criteria air pollutants were due to oil exploration and production activities.

Myth #4: "California could ban fracking and other oil production and still meet its energy needs."

Fact: While California continues to adopt policies requiring significant use of alternative and renewable energy, decision-makers recognize that petroleum products will remain an essential portion of our energy portfolio for the foreseeable future. In fact, Governor Brown recognized as much when he not long ago observed, “California imports 70 percent of our petroleum products; our cars drive over 330 billion miles mostly on petroleum. If we reduce our oil drilling in California, which a ban on fracking would do, we’ll import more oil by train or by boat, that doesn’t make a lot of sense.”

The bottom line is this: California’s approximately 39 million residents depend on clean petroleum products to meet their daily energy needs. And within our state’s strictest-in-the-nation regulatory framework, our oil and gas industry stands ready to safely and reliably supply that energy, now and well into the future all the while working to reduce CA air pollution and overall carbon emissions.

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