

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Op-Eds from ENSC230 Energy and the
Environment: Economics and Policies

Undergraduate Research in Agricultural Economics

Fall 12-16-2014

Say No to Natural Gas

Alex Bruening
alexbru449@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ageconugensc>

Bruening, Alex, "Say No to Natural Gas" (2014). *Op-Eds from ENSC230 Energy and the Environment: Economics and Policies*. 45.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ageconugensc/45>

This Letter to the Editor is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research in Agricultural Economics at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Op-Eds from ENSC230 Energy and the Environment: Economics and Policies by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Alex Bruening
Op-Ed ENSC230
12/10/2014
alexbru449@gmail.com

Say No to Natural Gas

In President Obama's State of The Union Address, he states, "America is closer to energy independence than we've been in decades... One of the reasons why is natural gas – if extracted safely, it's the bridge fuel that can power our economy with less of the carbon pollution that causes climate change." The truth of the matter is, natural gas is neither safely extracted nor a cleaner fuel than oil in terms of pollution.

Natural gas is extracted through the process of fracking. When done incorrectly, fracking is dangerous to human health and the environment. "Natural gas producers have been running roughshod over communities across the country with their extraction and production activities for too long, resulting in contaminated water supplies, dangerous air pollution, destroyed streams, and devastated landscapes. Weak safeguards and inadequate oversight fail to protect our communities from harm". At least 15.3 million Americans lived within a mile of a well that has been drilled since 2000, and have been affected by natural gas extraction. Contaminated water supplies and destroyed landscapes have caused citizens to leave their communities in search of a place where natural gas will not affect their well-being.

One of the largest arguments supporting natural gas is that it burns cleaner than other fossil fuels, leading people to believe that natural gas is less harmful to the environment. "While it is true natural gas burns cleaner than other fossil fuels, methane leaking during the production, delivery and use of natural gas has the potential to undo much of the greenhouse gas benefits we think we're getting when natural gas is substituted for other fuels." Government leaders, such as Barack Obama, use the argument that natural gas burns cleaner to support the use of natural gas

without recognizing the fact that the methane released in production is equally, if not more, detrimental to the environment. “Methane, the primary component of natural gas, is a powerful, short-lived greenhouse gas. It is more than 100 times more potent at trapping energy than carbon dioxide (CO₂), the principal contributor to man-made climate change. When considering its conversion to carbon dioxide over time its impact on an integrated weight basis is 72 times more potent after 20 years and 25 times more potent after 100 years.” The detriment of methane released in natural gas often goes unrecognized, although it holds a significant impact on the environment.

Barack Obama’s request for increased natural gas production and usage is admirable and I respect his decision to want to make changes in the United States. Natural gas, in Obama’s defense, does have benefits. Economically and politically, natural gas is a fuel source that is and will be a great resource for the United States. Politically, the usage of natural gas takes away the foreign oil dependence the United States has had for decades. Without a foreign dependence, the United States is given more freedom in energy and fuel prices. Economically, natural gas is providing the United States with impressive economic advantages. “This provides tremendous advantages for American consumers and businesses in the form of reliable, affordable and clean fuel for power generation, manufacturing and other industries; feedstocks for chemical and agricultural products; and jobs and government revenue associated with natural gas production... In fact, a recent economic impact study found that the natural gas industry contributed more than \$380 billion to the U.S. economy in a single year and is responsible for 2.8 million American jobs.” Through its economic and political benefits, natural gas is a fair replacement to conventional fossil fuels.

The support for natural gas can be summarized as a debate between the importance of the environment and economy. Environmentally, through methane leakage, contamination of water, destruction of landscape, and danger to people's health, natural gas is not a fuel that should be relied upon to become the main fuel source for the United States. On the other hand, through cheap production, reliability, creation of jobs, and domestically produced revenue, natural gas could have economic benefits. Ultimately, the original reason to find a replacement for conventional fossil fuels was to replace them with a cleaner fuel source, and natural gas is not cleaner. Although natural gas could greatly benefit the United States economy, the detriments to the environment and health of United States citizens greatly outweighs the benefits to our nation's economy. Say No To Natural Gas.

References:

- Obama, B. (2014, January 28). President Barack Obama's State of the Union Address. *The White House*. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/28/president-barack-obamas-state-union-address>
- NRDC. Unchecked Fracking Threatens Health, Water Supplies. *Natural Resources Defense Council*. Retrieved from <http://www.nrdc.org/energy/gasdrilling/>
- Gold, R. (2014, March 24). How Many People Are Affected by Fracking? *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2014/03/24/how-many-people-are-affected-by-fracking/>
- Pacala, S. (2014). What will it take to get sustained benefits from natural gas? *Environmental Defense Fund*. Retrieved from <http://www.edf.org/methaneleakage>
- Mobil, Exxon. (2014). economic impact. *About Natural Gas*. Retrieved from <http://aboutnaturalgas.com/content/key-benefits/economic-impact/>