

OPINION

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PRO-CON

Will ban on fossil fuel energy by 2045 devastate California's economy?



AP Photo/Noah Berger



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TOP LEFT: Wind turbines line the Altamont Pass near Livermore, Calif. TOP RIGHT: Workers install solar electrical panels on the roof of a home in Glendale, Calif. ABOVE: Solar Impulse 2, a solar-powered plane, flies over San Francisco in 2016.

PRO: Brown's dream of banning fossil fuels is a 21st century pipe dream

DALLAS — Outgoing California Gov. Jerry Brown wants to be remembered as an environmental warrior — regardless of how much it costs Golden State residents and businesses.

The governor just signed legislation requiring utilities to generate 60 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2030, with a goal of phasing out all fossil fuels by 2045.

Then he headed to the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco for a victory lap, where he boasted that the state would launch its “own damn satellite” to track “climate pollutants” — apparently trying to outdo NASA's Orbiting Carbon Observatory-2, which has been doing just that since 2014.

Even though California's per-person carbon emission rate is fairly low, it's the second-largest state emitter of carbon dioxide, according to the government's Energy Information Administration (EIA).

Ironically, given the cleaner-than-thou rhetoric coming from the governor, California's reduction in hydro power meant its reliance on non-carbon sources for electricity generation actually fell between 2000 and 2015, from 78 billion kilowatt hours to 59 billion, according to the EIA.

By contrast, oil and natural gas mega-producer Texas more than doubled its renewable energy usage from 39 billion kilowatt hours in 2000 to 86 billion in 2015, and nearly all of the increase was from wind power.

That should indicate that fossil fuels and renewable energy aren't contradictory, they're complimentary — and will have to be for decades to come.

Although California has in recent years significantly increased its reliance on wind and solar power for electricity generation — especially solar, where it has become the national leader — both wind and solar power are sporadic, producing electricity only when the wind blows and the sun shines.

Brown hopes to address that intermittency problem by transitioning to a regional electrical power grid that includes other western states — which, not coincidentally, use fossil fuels to create electricity.

That way, California can offload any additional renewable-based power during peak times for wind and sun, and then draw on fossil fuel-generated electricity to fill in the gaps.

Brown claims that unless he gets his regional power grid, California residents will have to pay a lot more for electricity. He's got that right, but they're already paying a lot more.

The EIA says the average retail price for electricity in California is 15.23 cents per kilowatt hour — higher than all but six states. Unfortunately, Brown's efforts will likely

make California the most expensive state for electricity ratepayers, and he knows it. Sometimes it's not good being No. 1.

Brown told an audience at the bill signing ceremony, “Those who don't want (the regional grid) are going to be foisting very high prices on California.”

No, governor, it's you who are foisting very high prices on Californians by pushing your all-renewable-energy dream, even as you try to hide the state's reliance on fossil fuels.

A better solution would be for California to turn to “carbon capture” from natural gas.

The Associated Press reports that California has 54,000 active wells and is the 15th largest producer of natural gas among the states. Natural gas is already one of the cleanest-burning fossil fuels, but a new generation of natural gas-powered generators hopes to remove all of the carbon.

One is just starting up in Texas. News and opinion website Vox reports that the company Net Power says it will be able to “generate power more efficiently than conventional power plants, in a smaller physical footprint, with zero air pollution, and capture the carbon — all at a capital cost below traditional power plants.”

That's a tall order and it's still a work in progress. But it's much more believable — and doable — than Brown's all-renewables power plants. And it might actually cost Californians less. Wouldn't that be a change for the better?

Merrill Matthews is a resident scholar with the Institute for Policy Innovation.



MERRILL MATTHEWS

CON: Fossil fuel ban will actually boost California's economy

BALTIMORE — Requiring clean energy will help California's economy, not hurt it.

One obvious reason is that electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles are extremely efficient technologies that improve the state's economy by saving consumers a lot of money in fuel costs.

The benefits of electric vehicles are well-known. Driving an EV decreases the nation's dependence on oil, reduces fuel costs over time and cuts pollution.

And, most EVs on the road in the United States are also made in America.

For example, a report from Argonne National Laboratory found a higher fraction of plug-in electric vehicles (PEVs) were assembled in the United States than non-PEVs in 2017.

Achieving the greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets would support a \$76 billion increase in California's gross state product as well as a \$48 billion increase in real household incomes and the creation of 403,000 new efficiency and climate-driven jobs.

California already gets more clean energy venture capital investment than all states combined.

Alternative energy is by far the fastest-growing segment of the energy industry today. Wind and solar alone account for more than half of the new electricity capacity installed in the U.S., and they're growing domestically and around the world.

In 2009, while other sectors saw little or no investment, the clean technology sector in California received \$2.1 billion, 60 percent of the total in North America.

Venture capital investments there totaled nearly \$6.6 billion from 2006 to 2008, about five times more than its nearest competitor.

Also, venture capital investment produces thousands of new jobs. Each \$100 million in venture capital funding helps create 2,700 jobs, \$500 million in annual revenues for two decades and many indirect jobs.

The ban on fossil fuel energy likely will increase venture capital investment in California, according to a study by the National Venture Capital Association

One major reason is that green technologies produce new jobs faster. Investments in green technologies create jobs at a higher rate than investments in comparable conventional technologies.

And the first beneficiaries of green job growth will be workers who are currently unemployed, according to a report from UC Berkeley.

When it comes to electricity generation in the U.S., the Department of Energy's 2017 Energy and Employment Report found that the solar industry now employs more people than coal, oil, and gas combined.

More than 373,000 Americans worked part or full time in solar energy, and just over 260,000 of them — or about 70 percent — spent a majority of their time on solar projects.

Most solar energy jobs were in installation, construction and manufacturing, as the relatively new industry continued to add capacity.

According to the Sierra Club's analysis, nearly every state in the country has more jobs in clean energy than fossil fuels; just nine states have more jobs in fossil fuels than in clean energy.

The green economy could soon become the nation's fastest-growing job segment, accounting for roughly 10 percent of new jobs over the next 20 years — up to 4.2 million new green jobs — with 500,000 in California alone, according to a recent report from the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

Conservative pundits love to lampoon Jerry Brown, nicknaming him “Gov. Moonbeam” for his infectious enthusiasm for new ideas.

Brown hasn't figured out how to create energy from moonbeams yet, but he's doing a pretty good job with sun and wind gusts. From where I sit he deserves applause, not boos.

Whitt Flora, an independent journalist, covered the White House for The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch and was chief congressional correspondent for Aviation Week & Space Technology magazine.



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