



U.S. energy renaissance helps achieve significant emission reductions

December 15, 2015

In early December, world leaders gathered in Paris to attempt to develop a global consensus on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on a global scale. Achieving an agreement between more than 190 nations means overcoming differing and inconsistent national priorities and economic interests. For any hope of success, the guiding principles of the commitments must be grounded in science, economic and energy realities, and proven results. There is no place for rigid adherence to ideology.

The U.S. now has an opportunity to highlight how America's private sector already has achieved significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, even as we have increased the production of safe, affordable and reliable energy for consumers. Our nation's success in reducing emissions has been driven, not by government mandate, but by the entrepreneurial spirit our nation is known for, of innovation, investment and perseverance.

According to data provided by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, carbon emissions from the U.S. power sector have been reduced significantly during the last several years and are now near 27-year lows.

Methane emissions are also plummeting, falling 13 percent from the oil and natural gas systems sector since 2011. As a matter of fact, methane emissions from hydraulically fractured natural gas wells have fallen by 83 percent since 2011, according to the most recent EPA data.

Methane is a product of value, and natural gas producers have taken years to develop and invested millions in new technology to produce and make the product available to consumers. In spite of that, the federal government continues to pursue regulations that impose unnecessary barriers to responsible development with little concomitant benefit.

The fact is our nation's 21st century oil and natural gas renaissance has made domestically produced oil and natural gas economical and abundant. This market-driven success has helped our nation achieve significant emissions reductions.

By contrast, the Obama Administration continues to adhere to the stale mindset of last century's thinking that increased oil and natural gas production and achieving climate goals are not compatible. The administration continues to pursue costly government mandates to the disadvantage of the American consumer and our economy.

For example, the administration's Clean Power Plan ignores the phenomenal benefits of natural gas and pushes power plants to adopt sources such as wind and solar. By giving preference to unreliable and more costly sources, the policy marginalizes natural gas, the energy source that provides the greatest benefit.

The commitment to reducing emissions should not be driven by dogmatic ideologies or measured by which nation damages its economy the most. It should be based on science and economic realities and measured by proven emission-reduction results. It also should take into account the actual energy landscape. Because the fact is we'll need more energy if we are to meet the world's growing future energy needs. The International Energy Agency projects that by 2040, world energy demand will increase by 45 percent, and nearly 60 percent of that demand will be supplied by oil and natural gas.

Contrary to what many activists espouse, fossil fuels and environmental stewardship are not and never have been mutually exclusive.

The fact is responsible oil and natural gas exploration and production has been and will continue to be a key component to making the U.S. a world leader in emissions reductions. While other nations have made pledges, we have real-world proven progress and results.

The U.S. and the world need to avoid massive, command-and-control government mandates to keep energy costs down for consumers. The U.S. private sector has shown significant reductions in emissions can be achieved through market-based measures that avoid damage to economic growth, energy production and jobs.

More than a billion people around the world face challenges for adequate food and education, clean water and protection from heat and cold because of lack of access to safe, affordable and reliable energy. We should work to ensure more people have access to safe, affordable and reliable energy, no matter which state, nation or continent they reside. Because to rise out of poverty and enjoy health and safety, these developing nations need more energy, not less.

Edward Cross is president of the Kansas Independent Oil & Gas Association.