

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Thursday, Feb. 23, 2012:](#)

Plant's conversion makes sense for the Valley

Wind and solar have been the driving forces behind Kern's green energy industry, but lesser-known projects are also contributing. A good example is the Mt. Poso Cogeneration plant, which for 20 years produced power for the grid and steam for nearby oil fields by burning coal and, at times, waste tires. Thanks to a recent conversion project, the plant now runs solely on biomass -- mainly wood waste from local agriculture and municipal programs.

The conversion will not necessarily reduce the plant's air emissions. In producing 44 megawatts of electricity a day, it has long been a major source of air pollution in the southern San Joaquin Valley. However, we can't overlook the external benefits of the conversion. The plant will no longer import coal from Utah by diesel train. In switching to wood fuels, it will instead provide a local repository for trees and trimmings from nearby orchards. In the past, this waste was openly burned in farm fields, contributing to poor air quality. The plan will also take in other wood waste that would have gone to landfills to rot, generating more greenhouse gas emissions than by being burned at the plant.

The benefits of the conversion may be small, but they are important nonetheless in driving us toward a future of cleaner, greener energy.

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Sat., Feb. 25, 2012:](#)

U.S. energy independence requires a balanced strategy

By Timothy Lemucchi

Conserving energy and developing new energy sources. Those used to be "good things." But that was before this election year made them political footballs to be kicked around.

I suppose if I wanted to, I could heat and cool my home and leave my lights burning without regard for how much energy I am consuming. And in truck-driving Kern County, I could join a lot of other people on the road, and roar between my home and downtown Bakersfield office in a four-wheel-drive gas-guzzler.

But instead, I installed 15 kilowatts of solar panels next to my house, which drastically cut -- and at times eliminated -- my home's fossil fuel consumption. Some months, my electric bills are as low as \$25.

When Nissan last year unveiled its all-electric plug-in Leaf automobile, I bought one. I have driven the car now almost 5,000 miles and have not purchased one tank of gas. In addition, this vehicle produces zero emissions. Just imagine what the widespread use of zero-emission transportation would do for the air quality of our San Joaquin Valley. Likewise, the use of hybrid-gas vehicles in the valley would drastically reduce air pollution.

My garage is equipped with a plug-in station fed by the solar panels with a timer to charge the battery during the periods when Pacific Gas and Electric has its lowest rates. A nightly charge gives me 110 miles of gas-free and emission-free driving the next day. The electric car is a perfect fit for my daily commute to work and running around town.

Those are just two of the things I have done to help myself -- and the United States -- move toward "energy independence" and away from the grip of foreign oil-producing nations that are often not our friends.

Those are personal choices I made. I am not proposing they be forced on anyone else. But I thought I was being "patriotic" when I made those choices. Now, to hear some of the political blathering of late, you would think that these kinds of "green energy" and conservation choices are part of a tree-hugging, eco-freaking, un-American conspiracy.

It's time to get a grip and regain our perspective.

There are costs associated with relying on traditional fossil fuel energy sources and engaging in excessive consumption. Supplies are limited. At the whims of oil producers, prices can spike and

availability can disappear. A nation's economy -- and families' purse strings -- are easily held hostage.

"Drill, baby, drilling" for oil in the continental U.S. -- even extending that drilling to off the California coast and to now-protected lands -- cannot meet all U.S. energy needs. New, innovative energy sources must be developed.

Developing renewable energy -- often referred to as "green energy" because of its less-polluting nature -- is not an "extreme" concept that threatens the nation's oil industry. Rather, it is a complementary strategy that will help the U.S. reach "relative" energy independence. I say "relative" because we will never be completely energy-independent. Multinational oil companies control supplies in the U.S. and around the world to benefit their corporate financial interests, not national ones.

Government "incentives" are being used to nurture the fledgling renewable energy industry. These incentives are financial -- including tax breaks and loans -- and regulatory. In California, the state's pioneering global warming law has provided a strong "regulatory incentive." By 2020, 33 percent of the state's energy must come from renewable sources.

For decades, both Republican and Democratic presidents have provided financial incentives to encourage energy innovation. In the 1980s and 1990s, Kern County's fledgling wind energy industry benefited greatly from these federal and state incentives. Today, tax breaks, loans and stimulus funds are helping develop renewable energy projects, including those that harness wind, solar, geothermal and biomass in Kern County.

Will all of these fledgling efforts succeed? No. The debacle surrounding the federal energy loan to California solar panel manufacturer Solyndra is a spectacular example of failure. Does that mean government assistance for renewable energy development should end? Hardly. Decades of government investment in innovative industries have advanced the nation economically and technologically. Whether it has been to build a transcontinental railroad or land a man on the moon, the government has been a partner in innovation.

But there are risks. These risks must be carefully weighed against benefits. And the failures must be used to help shape strategies for moving forward.

Kern County has and will continue to benefit greatly from green energy initiatives.

Recognizing the benefits, including job creation, local business representatives, including the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce and the Kern Economic Development Corp., last year began promoting Kern County as the "Energy Capital of America." From its vast oil fields to its innovative wind, solar, geothermal and biomass projects, Kern County has a wealth of energy production.

Consumers -- families and businesses -- also have contributed to making Kern County a renewable energy "star."

This month, Bakersfield was listed among California's top 10 "solar cities." Singling out First Congregational Church's recent investment, PG&E noted Bakersfield ranks sixth in the state in solar generation, with 16 megawatts.

With the help of rebate incentives provided by PG&E and the California Solar Initiative, the Stockdale Highway church installed solar panels to provide a clean and reliable source of energy. First Congregational Church is one of 1,943 PG&E Bakersfield customers to install solar systems.

A balanced strategy is needed for Americans to achieve energy independence and to develop cleaner, less-polluting energy supplies. That strategy must include:

- * Support for innovation and increased production in both traditional fossil fuel and renewable energy.

- * Protection of the environment, whether it is when drilling for oil, or constructing green energy projects.

* Encouragement of "conservative" use of all forms of energy.

Timothy Lemucchi is a longtime Bakersfield personal injury attorney.

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Sat., Feb. 25, 2012:](#)

AB32: A misguided state law based on a dubious theory

By Dr. Girish Patel

AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act, became a law in 2006 under Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. The law set a goal of greenhouse emissions reduction by 2020: bring carbon emissions down to 1990 levels and produce 30 percent of energy from "renewable sources." The California Air Resources Board has been given authority to develop a plan to reach this goal. The bureaucrats even formed an Environmental Justice Committee.

Under this law, the energy-producing industries (utilities, energy companies, just about everyone) will pay heavy fines. Of course consumers will pay because, in the words of candidate Barack Obama, "energy costs will necessarily skyrocket."

I wrote in this space about the Anthropologic Global Warming theory and its fallacy back in December 2009. A lot has changed since, including the name: It's now "climate change."

There have been several recent developments further discrediting the AGW theory. I thought it prudent to revisit the issue.

* The Climate Research Unit at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom was a leading researcher in AGW theory. Now, based on readings from 30,000 measuring stations, they have released data showing that the rising trend in world temperatures ended in 1997. That is correct: the earth has not warmed since 1997.

* Actually, the scientists are now expecting a cooling effect from "grand minimum" output of the sun, threatening cold summers and bitter winters -- a mini ice age.

* Remember the claim that the Himalayan glaciers were going to disappear by 2035? Recent study has shown that there has been no ice lost over the last decade from the entire chain from Himalayas to Tian Shan.

* In a Wall Street Journal editorial, 16 scientists have questioned the effect of carbon dioxide on climate change. They write, "Even if one accepts the inflated climate change forecasts of IPCC, aggressive greenhouse-gas control policies are not justified economically."

* Nature magazine quotes a study: "The climate system may be less sensitive to greenhouse-gas warming than many models have predicted."

* After a decade of development, Germany gets 13 percent of its energy from renewable sources. According to Spiegel Online, after dropping 100 billion euros into the solar energy sinkhole, Germany is now cutting solar subsidies.

* Spain's green energy programs have been a colossal failure, leading to 23 percent unemployment and near bankruptcy of the country. A study found that each green job cost the Spaniards \$770,000, and each wind industry job cost \$1.3 million to create. Spain has halted subsidies for such projects.

* China announced a 40 percent reduction in its high-speed rail program expenditure.

* Barclay's Bank in the U.K. recently closed its California carbon trading desk.

* Last year, Britain rolled back subsidies for solar power, as have several other European countries, as austerity measures kick in.

* The American media, including The Californian, have yet to cover these failures.

In the U.S., a host of green energy companies received billions of dollars in subsidies, and either went bankrupt, or are near bankruptcy. Solyndra took down a half-billion dollars of taxpayers' money. Fisker Automobile in Finland, Beacon Power Co. and several others have received

billions of dollars of taxpayer money. On the other hand, President Obama wants to kill the Keystone pipeline, which would bring 700,000 barrels of oil every year from friendly Canada to the U.S. and generate well-paying private jobs.

So many green energy projects are failing because it is prohibitively expensive to generate energy from wind and sun. On the other hand, energy from fossil fuels -- oil, gas and coal -- is a cheap source, which the Obama and Jerry Brown administrations, together with the environmental lobby, are dead set against. Unfortunately, this opposition is based on the pseudo-science of man-made global warming, or carbon emissions, a theory which now has been effectively debunked.

According to researchers from the University of California, Berkeley, California gets significant pollution from China, something we can't do anything about.

Brown recently announced that he plans to finance high-speed rail from billions of dollars in fines collected under this law. He is implementing a very bad cap-and-trade idea to finance the equally bad, \$117 billion high-speed rail idea. California is hemorrhaging jobs because businesses are leaving in droves. Such moves by the politicians will drive out more job producers. Who will be left to pay for the train to nowhere? Amtrak can be upgraded for a fraction of the cost, which is a far better alternative to HSR.

AB 32 needs to be repealed and California's job producers need to be released from the shackles of such misguided policies.

Dr. Girish Patel is a practicing radiologist in Bakersfield and a longtime Bakersfield resident.

[Letter to the S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, Feb. 26, 2012:](#)

Tired of \$4 gas? Hop on a bicycle

Are you watching your nest egg dwindle because of \$4 gasoline? Are you stuck in traffic and having a hard time finding parking at the fitness center? Are you worried about pollution and global warming?

Well, have I got just the solution for you. Run, don't walk (or drive), down to your local bike shop and get fitted out for wheels which will save you money, improve your health and eliminate pollution.

Live it up in our sunny weather, and watch all those transportation troubles go away. Now, that's what I call winning the trifecta!

John Nidecker, Alameda