

Daily Camera

Cracking down on oil and gas and investing in renewables

June 11, 2016

It is past time that we take bold action to combat climate change and reduce the impact of impending catastrophic changes to our climate and our world. Taking aggressive action now is quite simply a moral imperative.

In Congress, I am working hard to unrig a system that favors the fossil fuel industry by ending their sweetheart deals and special tax subsidies; fighting for investments in renewable energy and innovation; and regulating the dangerous emissions that oil and gas companies release during extraction.

The oil and gas industry receives a plethora of permanent tax credits and subsidies, currently to the tune of about \$7 billion annually. We will never be able to break our reliance on fossil fuels as long as the government is giving them this unfair advantage. It's not enough to just fight for investment in renewable energy, which I do in Congress. We must level the playing field by eliminating unfair treatment including financial subsidies to the fossil fuel industry; or policies allowing fracking to bypass any local planning process and drill wells near schools or on private property without even getting permission from the landowner.

Most recently, I offered an amendment to the energy and water appropriations bill to reduce fossil fuel research subsidies by \$285 million, and in another recent appropriations bills, I attempted to strip millions from subsidies for oil shale drilling technology, because we shouldn't be wasting taxpayer dollars on propping up big oil and gas.

In conjunction with cutting fossil fuel subsidies and pricing carbon, we must double down on our investments in renewable energy research and energy efficiency. There are tremendous environmental consequences if we do not continue to invest in innovation.

The good news is many amazing discoveries are being developed right in our backyard. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) in Golden, for example, is on the cutting edge of renewable energy, partnering with private businesses throughout Colorado to develop technologies like improved wind towers and more efficient appliances.

I recently introduced legislation called the Solar EDGE Act which will harness this type of innovation, incentivizing clean energy and job growth. The bill will promote investment in small-scale solar projects, especially residential installation and encourage long-term job growth in the U.S. solar industry. Currently, many states across the country do not have affordable access to residential solar panels, partially because of state regulations, and partially because of the need for tax incentives, which this bill provides.

If we take steps like this to give renewable energy a fair shot, it will eventually provide a cheaper, cleaner, and more efficient way to power our homes and businesses.

The sad reality is right now the majority of our energy still comes from fossil fuels, and that is why we cannot wait to transition entirely to renewable energy before we address the harmful extraction process that releases dangerous chemicals such as methane. Pound for pound methane pollution from oil and gas wells is 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide, and it is responsible for a quarter of human-made climate change.

I am proud that we made some progress earlier this month when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized new and long overdue standards for the oil and gas industry which will reduce methane pollution. Although, I wish these new rules went further, these stricter standards are not only a good start, but are necessary because recently scientists have published more convincing data showing that the methane released during natural gas extraction is a silent, yet deadly climate threat.

We must continue on this path forward. It is time for Congress to stop picking favorites by allowing the fossil fuel industry and fracking to play by a different set of rules while emitting tons of chemicals into our air that put the future of our world into jeopardy.

U.S. Rep. Jared Polis represents Colorado's 2nd Congressional District.