

Washington Has Energy Production All Wrong

Biden was wrong to back a 1978 law mandating the use of coal, and he's wrong to push solar and wind now.

By
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gasoline station in Los Angeles, June 7. PHOTO: CAROLINE BREHMAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Gasoline prices had their biggest one-day increase in a year on July 25, rising to an eight-month high, while oil passed \$80 a barrel. More than half a century of experience working in the oil industry tells me that with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries doing all it can to keep prices high, the only way to prevent them from rising higher is to produce more oil and gas here at home.

President Biden has pursued the opposite strategy. Instead of increasing production, he wants to mandate that Americans use less—by banning or restricting the use of gas stoves, gas heat, air conditioning and even cars with combustible engines. That is a recipe for lower living standards, higher prices and a waning of America's geopolitical leadership.

Every time government intervenes in unpredictable energy markets, politicians get it wrong. Take the Fuel Use Act of 1978. **The young Sen. [Joe Biden](#) and Rep. Al Gore were among those who** championed the act, which **mandated the use of coal to generate electricity** because so-called experts were sure the U.S. was running out of oil and natural gas.

Then in 1980 the Carter administration spent billions of dollars on renewable-energy subsidies and even a business called Synthetic Fuels Corp. that went bankrupt six years later. When Ronald Reagan let the market work by deregulating energy, oil production soared and prices tumbled. No one worried about running out of oil anymore.

That is, until Barack Obama came into office. In 2011, when gasoline prices rose, Mr. Obama said that “we can’t just drill our way out of the problem.” He worried that America was going to run out of places to drill and that energy companies would want to drill on the Washington Mall. So instead Mr. Obama spent millions on now bankrupt propositions such as the solar-energy company Solyndra.

The politicians weren’t paying attention to the amazing shale revolution driven by such oil and natural gas companies as Continental Resources. Horizontal drilling exploded in the late 2000s in the Bakken Shale in North Dakota, the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania, and later in the Permian Basin in Texas. America has doubled its oil and gas output in less than 15 years.

Yet Mr. Biden still says wind and solar are the future. Let’s be honest. We’ve spent trillions of dollars on wind and solar, and the technology is maxed out. The blades are about as big as they can get, and the panels are going to become essentially worthless in years to come because of new technologies. We can go on shaping policy over pipe dreams and flawed math, or we can choose to put America on a path toward energy independence and dominance.

We can safely harvest American energy while protecting our environment too. In the past 20 years, despite large increases in oil and gas production, annual U.S. carbon-dioxide emissions from such sources have decreased, according to the Energy Information Administration. Such technologies as horizontal drilling have also allowed a single well on less than an acre to reach oil fields miles away in all directions.

I like to call the shale revolution the “trillion-dollar swing.” It’s money that stayed in the U.S., was invested here, and produced a bounty of clean, affordable American energy. We’re not going to run out, not for 100 years or more.

Politicians over the past 50 years have had a rotten record of predicting the next big thing in energy. They say the technology for battery storage and solar panels is improving, but the same can be said for fossil-fuel production.

We can all agree that when it comes to the most valuable natural resource—energy—it’s far smarter to trust markets than politicians to ensure a bountiful future.