



Attack carbon emissions using gas, nuclear power

By **RICHARD D. KINDER** Copyright 2009 Houston Chronicle

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Today the whole country, and especially Washington, D.C., is abuzz with exciting proposals on how to lessen the impact of mankind on climate change. Leaving aside many fascinating and complex questions that surround this issue, I would like to address just one: What is the most effective way of substantially reducing the amount of CO2 emitted in this country?

In my view, it's time to bring a realistic perspective to this problem. That means looking at the cold hard facts of the supply side of energy use in this country. If we convert all energy use, including transportation and electricity generation, to barrels of oil equivalent per day (boe/d), the United States consumes about 47.4 million boe/d. Of that volume, about 19 million boe/d (40 percent) is oil, 11.9 million boe/d (25 percent) is natural gas, 11.5 million boe/d (24 percent) is coal, 3.8 million boe/d (8 percent) is nuclear and 1.1 million boe/d (2 percent) is hydropower. Wind and solar combined supply just 76,000 boe/d, which amounts to about 1/6 of 1 percent of our energy needs. That means we could double or even triple our production from those renewable sources without having any meaningful reduction in our CO2 emissions.

Despite that indisputable fact, much of the rhetoric coming out of Washington continues to emphasize the encouragement and funding of those two sources as if they are the "silver bullets" in this equation. I have nothing against either solar or wind energy and hope we expand both, but to hype them as the solution to our problem is akin to asserting that we can control a severe flood on the Mississippi River by damming up a five-foot-wide creek in Iowa!

We need to attack this problem where we can have the most impact in a reasonable period of time. That should lead to massive efforts to expand the use of natural gas for electric generation and transportation needs, and development of a program to permit and build significant new nuclear capacity. Those goals should be reflected in any "cap-and-trade" legislation that Congress passes.

Natural gas is the cleanest fossil fuel, emitting about half the CO2 of coal. We have tremendous supplies of natural gas in the United States (probably in excess of 100 years at today's usage rates given recent dramatic increases in shale production in the lower 48 states) and it sells at a very reasonable price. New gas-fired electric generation is cheaper and quicker to build.

The supreme advantage of nuclear is that it emits no carbon into the atmosphere. While the cost of building nuclear facilities is greater and harder to pin down at this time, developing a new generation of identical "cookie cutter" plants should lead to much lower and more predictable costs in the intermediate to long term.

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Let me be clear — I have no objection to spending the taxpayers' money (and lots of it will be spent) in a wise and efficient manner on wind and solar energy, conservation efforts and on clean coal technology.

But I'm deathly afraid that we will end up wasting enormous sums of money and very valuable time without solving the problems we want to solve.

Natural gas and nuclear are the only answers I can see for the next 10 to 20 years and it's time we focused on those sources of supply in a real and meaningful way.

Kinder is CEO of Kinder Morgan, one of the largest pipeline and terminal operators in North America. Kinder Morgan transports but does not produce natural gas, nor does it have any involvement in the nuclear business.

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