



Get Houston Chronicle home delivery for only \$3 a week. Save 61%!

## The natural gas story

The nation has been given a gift by our energy sector. Let's unwrap it carefully

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

March 13, 2010, 6:40PM

If there's a headline from the recent CERAWeek conference here that deserves to be flashed in neon to President Barack Obama and the rest of the nation, it is this one: "Domestic natural gas is clean, cheap and plentiful — look here for answers, Mr. President, as you seek energy security."

Indeed. Natural gas appears to be all those things — and maybe much more. A report by IHS Cambridge Energy Research Associates, released here last week, confirms that North American gas potential has tripled in just the past three years.

Thanks largely to the opening of large shale gas areas across North America, there are more than 100 years of supplies at current consumption rates. Daniel Yergin, the respected author and energy analyst and father of CERAWeek, calls this the most significant energy innovation of the 21st century. But it will reach full potential only if policymakers in Washington are paying attention.

Are they listening? Not closely enough, we would judge. That is the real heavy lifting ahead for natural gas advocates: getting the message about this plentiful, clean-burning resource to the highest levels of the Obama administration. It is not there yet.



hp HIT PRINT AFFORDABLY

Have you HEARD THE BUZZ?  
**save \$50**

WHEN YOU TRADE IN YOUR OLD PRINTER

OFFICEJET PRO DELIVERS 50% LESS COST-PER-PAGE THAN LASER.

LEARN MORE AT HP.COM/OFFICEJETPRO

advertisement

In his address to CERAWeek attendees Tuesday, Energy Secretary Steven Chu was relentlessly on message in advancing the administration's position that the country must accelerate efforts to wean itself from fossil fuels to be part of a "new industrial revolution." And that was the problem, in the view of many in the energy-savvy audience at the industry's premier conference. Chu seemed almost tone-deaf to the welcome sounds of innovation and revolution echoing from across the oil patch, particularly regarding domestic natural gas supplies.

With every passing day, it becomes clearer that this transforming supply picture should figure prominently in national energy policy discussion. Here is why:

**Reliability:** The newly available gas supplies are not in Iraq, Iran, Venezuela; they can be found in places like Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Colorado, Pennsylvania and New York .

**Environment:** Natural gas is 50 percent cleaner to burn than coal, which now powers nearly half of our electrical output. Doubling the use of natural gas and lessening dependence on coal would reduce greenhouse emissions.

**National security:** Using more domestic gas to replace imports will limit our exposure to politically volatile regimes in Africa and the Middle East. Conceivably, this could result in significant savings in the national defense budget, eliminating the largely unnoticed

Advertisement



Have you HEARD THE BUZZ?  
**save \$50** WHEN YOU TRADE IN YOUR OLD PRINTER

OFFICEJET PRO DELIVERS 50% LESS COST-PER-PAGE THAN LASER.

hp HIT PRINT AFFORDABLY

LEARN MORE AT HP.COM/OFFICEJETPRO

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™



Get Houston Chronicle home delivery for only \$3 a week. Save 61%!

defense surtax paid by American energy consumers for Middle East oil.

**Balance of trade:** As gas from shale supplies replaces energy imports, it would bring us that much closer to energy independence while improving our balance of payments situation by literally hundreds of billions of dollars annually.

**Jobs, jobs, jobs:** Expanding the use of natural gas in this country will create thousands of stable, high-paying jobs in the exploration, extraction, marketing, transmission and construction areas. That is not to mention the multiplier effects in service sector areas such as restaurants, entertainment and lodging that promise thousands more jobs.

**High technology:** This emerging energy story is, at its core, a technology story — and a compelling one. Technology, much of it created in Houston, has opened up these vast new reserves of natural gas from shale formations. And there may be other opportunities waiting to be created in related energy areas. Just the other day, New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman wrote of two Indian-American entrepreneurs working on ideas that could be game-changers in the energy area. One is a fuel cell that could turn natural gas or natural *grass* into electricity; the other would convert CO2 produced in the coal burning process into concrete or aggregate that could be used in construction. Who knew?

**Compatibility with sustainable energy goals:** There is no conflict here. There is, rather, opportunity to use the savings brought by switching to natural gas to pay our way to a sustainable energy future. This will take time. Technologies for wind and solar are, in most experts' judgment, years away from meeting

advertisement

more than a small percentage of our energy needs.

Telling this story widely and well in the White House and across Washington's corridors of power is a mission worthy of the best efforts of the Texas congressional delegation.

We count ourselves among those who need to closely study the changing natural gas supply situation. We have held the view that natural gas and nuclear power are useful bridges to a new era of sustainable energy.

They are. But they could also be more. As ConocoPhillips CEO James Mulva rightly points out, the large increase in domestic gas potential, coupled with its clean burn, also makes it worthy of consideration as a preferred fuel over the longer term.

The one caveat, and it is significant, is the potential impact of the process known as fracking on the nation's water supply. Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, involves the pumping of water, chemicals and sand into shale formations at high pressure to release the natural gas trapped in the shale. In most gas-bearing formations, the gas typically is separated from water supplies by several thousand feet. If the job is done properly, there appears to be a minimum of risk to water supplies. But it must be done properly.

The Obama administration hasn't had a lot of

Advertisement

**PROTECT YOUR HOME**  
**FREE** Home Security System!  
 \$850 Value! Call NOW!

**1-877-246-7519**



At no cost to you for parts and activation with only a \$99 installation fee and the purchase of alarm monitoring services. Terms & Conditions apply.

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



Get Houston Chronicle home delivery for only \$3 a week. Save 61%!

good economic news to celebrate in its year-plus run, but the news about natural gas looks like it could be the real deal.

Let's take this gift of technological innovation from the country's vibrant, can-do energy sector and unwrap it carefully.

If the questions about impact on water supplies can be answered satisfactorily, and we believe they can, let's use it effectively to create jobs, lessen dependence on foreign energy, cut our defense costs, change our balance-of-payments picture for the better and make our air cleaner.

**30-Year Fixed Rate** **866-945-4410**  
\$200K loan for \$1,060/mo.

**Quicken Loans** \*Rates can change. Act now!

advertisement

Advertisement



Special Code: **45069ZWN**

**SAVE** up to **64%**  
Plus, get  
**3 FREE Gifts**

To Order:

[www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71](http://www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71)

or call 1-877-586-4455

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™