

Commentary

Dan Popeo: Enviros give America its first green recession

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WASHINGTON -

America is in the midst of its first green recession, an economic downturn caused in no small part by irrational ideological activism. Thirty years of punitive laws, restrictive environmental regulations, and special interests' obstructionist lawsuits have come home to roost in our dangerous dependence on foreign oil, escalating fuel prices and the collateral consequences of those costs.

Environmental extremism has long dominated American energy policy-making, and as a result, we are the only oil-producing nation in the world that limits access to its own abundant energy resources like oil, coal and natural gas. How can our leaders beseech other oil-rich nations to increase supply if we are restricting production right here at home? Let's face it, [OPEC](#) is a "Made in the [USA](#)" monopoly.

Congressional moratoriums, executive orders, and refusals to approve leasing of federal lands have placed billions of barrels of oil off limits. Federal agencies can't even do basic geological surveys on federal land to find potential sources of oil.

Environmental protection and oil exploration are no longer mutually exclusive. As the deputy director of the oil and gas division of the [Alaska Department of Natural Resources](#) recently said, "It's undeniable that the environmental impact is far less now than it was 25 or 30 years ago. The footprint is something like one-tenth of what it used to be."

However, on the rare occasion that the federal government grants approval for oil exploration on public lands, activists and their lawyers bombard energy companies with lawsuits.

Finally, even if we were able to tap into new domestic crude oil sources, a thicket of federal rules ensnares the expansion of existing U.S. oil refineries; a new refinery hasn't been built here since [Gerald Ford](#) was president.

Activism has consequences. All Americans are suffering from this self-inflicted energy paralysis. We feel the pain every time we go to the grocery store, commute to work or shuttle our kids around to after-school activities.

As [The Wall Street Journal](#) recently reported, even those who don't drive — shut-ins, the elderly, and the disabled — are affected by high gas prices as services such as [Meals on Wheels](#) are limited or curtailed. No sector of the economy is immune, and those who can least afford price increases of basic staples like gas and food are suffering the most.

Federal and state policy makers are failing to confront our stagnant domestic energy production. Instead, spotlight-seeking federal elected officials demagogue oil companies, hauling their executives before Congress for self-righteous lectures. Or other politicians push legislation that would empower the plaintiffs' bar to sue [OPEC](#) and other oil producers.

At the state level, [California](#), as it normally does, ranks right up there with Congress in its penchant for pursuing non-solutions. For instance, instead of making energy cheaper in California, that state's unelected Public Utility Commission (PUC) is tacking on an audacious (and probably unconstitutional) fee to customers' electric bills to fund a \$600 million climate change "think tank."

Environmental activists, perhaps angling for a piece of the research pie, wholeheartedly supported the concept. One Californian, who objected to ratepayers being singled out for such funding, asked of the PUC commissioners, "Are they consumer advocates? I just wonder."

Politicians are eager to tout "alternative" sources of electricity, but too many follow in lock step with their environmental

elitist allies when it comes to dismissing nuclear power. Activists' and politicians' hypocritical stance on such energy has deprived the U.S. of new nuclear power plants for 20 years. [Europe](#) has long embraced this safe and reliable energy source. If it's good enough for the highly risk-averse French, why not us?

If special interests want to further their Luddite agenda, the rest of us shouldn't have to pay for it. Instead of seeking ways to balance use and enjoyment of our resources — which is, after all, true environmentalism — serial activism has helped drive us into a green recession.

It's time to put Americans to work tapping into the abundant energy supply we have right here at home. How much worse do things have to get before our leaders free America's economy and allow our entrepreneurial spirit to make everyone's lives better?

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