

What fools we mortals be to fear fracking

Phil Fullerton, Fresno Bee, 5-23-13

Fullerton of Fresno is a retired lawyer.

In my dream world, I am walking along the San Joaquin River near Highway 99 and come upon an encrusted ancient bottle carefully screw-capped.

I open it with difficulty, my hands covered with sticky mud. Out pops a Gold Rush-garbed genie who sets aside his pick ax, thanks me with a bow and gives me one wish to reward me for his release after 150 years in the bottle.

I decide to go for the maximum!

"I want to create jobs in our Valley with its huge numbers of poor and unemployed. And I want to help our schools, not only here in the Valley but in the state of California. I want to solve our California budget shortfall."

And then I think, what the heck, go for it. "I want to help America stay out of Mid-eastern wars so our young people won't be killed. I want to weaken Russia's grip on Central and Western Europe with its supply of fossil fuels. And I want to help the United States meet the challenge of a growing China," I pant with exhaustion.

To my surprise, the genie replies, "Easy. I give you the Monterey shale almost under your feet which holds 15.4 billion barrels of oil. And natural gas as well. It will give you all of these things by hydraulic fracking." Then he disappears, saying that I could recall him by stroking the jar, but would get no more wishes.

I rush home to research his proposal.

"Fracking" was a new process discovered by U.S. and western oil companies to free up vast amounts of fossil fuel: petroleum and gas. Yes, according to a University of Southern California study, there would be 2.8 million jobs created by drilling out these California resources. And the state and local California authorities would get \$24.6 billion in new revenues. Wow. This would give me both of my first wishes: a major cut in unemployment and help to all, including our schoolchildren and also the poor.

And it would help the United States free itself of the need to import foreign oil. This has been a cause of deep involvement in the Middle East, where thousands of Americans have lost their lives. Already, the fracking in America has forced Gazprom, the Russian giant energy producer, to cut its prices to Central and Western Europe.

Indeed, most surveys say America can achieve fuel independence in a decade or so due to fracking. Energy-hungry China would be disadvantaged by a United States totally fuel independent while it searched the globe for such resources, threatening nearby nations for dominion of offshore islands.

Several states are already booming. North Dakota has a housing and labor shortage, Texas has found new prosperity and Pennsylvania is sharing its fracking revenue with local governments.

My research also shows that there have been few if any environmental problems with this process. Yet, it also shows that California's legislators are considering a long-term moratorium on this huge potential, and a federal judge has issued a temporary injunction against some fracking.

Perplexed, I rub the jar and the genie appears again. I explain all of this to him. With a Shakespearean touch, he says, "What fools these mortals be."

And I have to agree. To avert a small environmental risk, we potentially are heading for huge risks: unemployment; a Valley and state suffering from lack of revenues to not only help the most disadvantaged citizens but to repair collapsing infrastructure; a still extant dependence on other nations for fossil fuels that endangers our young men and women in a need to protect against source destruction; a China now rivaling us on the world stage, but a nation hungrily searching for energy supplies; and a Russia dominating Europe with its energy sources.

Yes, "What fools we mortals be."