

Focus on the message, not the messenger, in anti-oil activities

Gordon Nipp, Bakersfield Californian, 11-13-15

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This is in response to the Oct. 31 article “Anti-oil activists to protest Kern rules” and Richard Beene’s blog of Nov. 2.

Referring to environmentalists, Kern Citizens for Energy Executive Director Tracy Leach said: “It’s hard to ignore the incredible hypocrisy as they ride in their buses made of and fueled by petroleum products.”

Leach’s charge that environmentalists, in using fossil fuel-powered vehicles, are hypocrites is often made by fossil fuel industry promoters to those critical of their activities. Leach’s reasoning is fallacious – attacking the messenger rather than the message. She should focus on the message: Our one and only planet is overheating due to burning fossil fuels, and we need to transition to a sustainable better energy protocol.

Advocating for a better way (in this case, based on overwhelming scientific consensus) has historically led to spectacular progress even if the advocates had to depend upon existing resources. Would American Revolutionary soldiers who used English weapons to defeat the English be considered hypocrites by Ms. Leach?

None of the folks who advocate for transitioning away from fossil fuels call for an unrealistic, abrupt cutoff from oil. For that matter, because of resistance to change from the powerful oil industry, there is not much choice at this point to using fossil fuel-powered vehicles.

But science is clear – a transition should start now. With some thought, it can be a reasoned and considerate transition. A civilized discussion would avoid name-calling.

TBC President and CEO Richard Beene blogs, “It was mildly amusing to read that busloads of anti-fossil fuel activists will be descending on Bakersfield soon in order to ‘save’ us from oil production. And exactly who are these people who think we need to be ‘saved,’ anyway?” A couple of thoughts in response:

- Who are these people? These are citizens with strong convictions who decided to leave their homes at midnight to attend the hearing before the Kern Board of Supervisors, scheduled for maximum inconvenience at 9 a.m. last Monday morning. They feel that the Kern oil and gas project and EIR is severely flawed, and, since it involves 80 percent of California’s oil resources and affects them, they feel they have a major stake in it.
- Do other Californians think that we Kern County folks need to be “saved”? Hardly. I suspect they want to “save” themselves and their children from the adverse statewide effects of the new Kern County policy that allows secretive business-as-usual in the massive Kern oilfields, contributes to the warming of our planet, and inordinately impacts minority communities.
- Mr. Beene was amused while others are alarmed. The project these folk came to protest has major statewide and nationwide impacts, not restricted to Kern County. We in Kern County should respect their serious right and duty to have attended the hearing. Mr. Beene’s judgment is questionable.