

Bradbury says LNG 'dirty fuel' for state

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Oregon Secretary of State Bill Bradbury is the first high-ranking state executive to voice firm opposition to construction of any liquefied natural-gas terminal in Oregon.

Speaking at a global warming forum Wednesday in Forest Grove, Bradbury said he believed the facilities would take the state "180 degrees the wrong direction," increasing its dependence on fossil fuels just as the state has launched an effort to sharply increase the use of renewable energy, such as wind and solar.



Bradbury's stance is the latest sign that LNG is fast becoming a political hot potato in Oregon.

Out-of-state companies have proposed building three terminals in the state: one in Coos Bay and two on the Columbia River. The terminals would accept imports of supercooled natural gas from abroad, reheat the liquid into a gas, and ship the gas to West Coast markets through one of four proposed pipelines that would run through hundreds of miles of farms and forests.

Bradbury's position against LNG puts him on the opposite side of the increasingly heated debate from Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

Kulongoski has expressed cautious support for LNG -- particularly the facility proposed for Coos Bay -- as "a bridge resource" to help the state transition to a renewable future.

Bradbury said Thursday that he'd had only one conversation about LNG with Kulongoski and realized they disagreed about the issue. But he said he intended to take it up with him again.

"LNG is a dirty fuel that adds to the greenhouse gases we're putting into the environment," Bradbury said. In addition, Bradbury said he was worried about magnifying the state's dependence on foreign fossil fuels. Adding LNG terminals now, he said, would be similar to the oil glut that came after the Arab oil embargo in the 1970s, which extended U.S. dependence on imported oil from unstable countries.

"What are we doing? Hello? Have we learned anything?" Bradbury said.

Bradbury, Kulongoski and State Treasurer Randall Edwards hold the three votes on the State Land Board, which may need to approve the use of state lands for any LNG terminal and associated pipelines to carry gas to market.

Bradbury made his initial remarks Wednesday at a "Focus the Nation" event at Pacific University in Forest Grove. Focus the Nation is a national campaign to brainstorm solutions to global warming.

Kulongoski was slated to speak at a Focus the Nation event at the University of Portland on Thursday night, where he could face questions on the issue from students.

Kulongoski has worked hard to build an environmental legacy during his second term. Those efforts have included his support of a law that will force utilities to serve 25 percent of their customer demand from renewable sources by 2025.

Plusses, minuses

Natural gas-fired power plants have lower carbon emissions than coal-burning ones, so environmental advocates typically see them as the lesser of two evils. Yet critics contend that the total carbon impact of LNG -- including the energy to extract it, liquefy it, ship it overseas, re-gassify it, then send it to market -- make it a far bigger polluter than domestic natural gas.

Proponents of the LNG terminals and pipelines contend that imports are crucial to diversify Oregon's energy sources as supplies tighten. Opponents believe the state's gas supply is more than adequate, and Oregonians shouldn't bear the environmental burden for facilities that would ship gas out of state. The import capacity of any one of the proposed projects dwarfs the natural gas consumption of Oregon.

In addition to the import terminals, energy companies have proposed building separate natural-gas pipelines that would import natural gas from the Rocky Mountains into southern Oregon.

The question of need has become a contentious issue in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's environmental review of the facilities.

Both state officials and federal natural-resource agencies have pushed FERC to perform a comprehensive analysis that covers all new gas facilities proposed in the state, looking first at the need for additional supply, then determining which facility would have the least environmental impact.

FERC has overall siting authority for the import terminals and pipelines, but it intends to consider each project on its own environmental merit, then let the market determine which get built.

FERC Commissioner Jon Wellinghoff traveled to Oregon this week and held an unusual series of meetings in Salem to allay concerns and answer questions about the federal process from state Department of Energy officials as well as landowners and other members of the public.

Participants said Wellinghoff apologized to attendees for some shortcomings in FERC's process and promised to bring their concerns back to Washington, D.C.

Bradbury, who participated via conference call, said he hoped the exchange would improve the federal review.

"We need to make sure this process works for the people of Oregon," he said.

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