

Reality Check

By Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

We live in strange times. Over the course of the past 20 or more years television programming such as so-called survival shows which are completely fabricated have been enormously popular under the cloak of “reality”. The Fairness Doctrine, which regulated the airwaves, preventing the dissemination of opinion in the guise of news, and promoting a culture of shared facts, was formally repealed in 1987, but until 2000 editorial and personal attack provisions remained. It was finally completely repealed in 2011. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Fairness-Doctrine>) The elimination of the Fairness Doctrine made it possible for radical right, radical left, and every shade of purple between to broadcast via cable “news” information without a shared foundation of reality-based facts. The tribes have set up camp on their respective sides of the island, and no amount of proof about the actual facts of reality will convince the other tribe that they might be mistaken.

So now actual facts, like the fact about there being ten times more jobs in green and renewable energy than in fossil fuels, are drowned out by the tribal talking points of indignant politicians who claim jobs are not a priority of the current administration. These same politicians will ignore the fact that in the past 100 years Republican administrations have been worse for the economy than the Democratic ones (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/02/opinion/sunday/democrats-economy.html>) They will ignore the fact that if completed the Keystone XL pipeline would produce less than 50 full time US jobs. According to Marketplace.org, despite the promises POTUS 45 made to the coal industry, “The reality was that by pursuing what you might call an all-of-the-above energy strategy, in particular one focused on oil and gas, that actually hurt the coal industry.” (<https://www.marketplace.org/2021/02/08/biden-coal-energy-industry-policy-renewables-natural-gas/>)

Reality Check: the *pause* on leasing of public lands by executive order in January 2021 is not a *ban*. “The Executive Order will direct the Department of the Interior to pause new oil and natural gas leasing on public lands and offshore waters, concurrent with a comprehensive review of the federal oil and gas program. The targeted pause does not impact existing operations or permits for valid, existing leases, which are continuing to be reviewed and approved. The order does not restrict energy activities on private or state lands, or lands that the United States holds in trust or restricted status for Tribes or individual Indians.” The order also applies what is known as the 30x30 initiative, which “will direct the Interior Department to outline steps to achieve the President’s commitment to conserve at least 30% each of our lands and waters by the year 2030, as recommended by scientists, in order to safeguard our health, food supplies, biodiversity, and the prosperity of every community.” (<https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/fact-sheet-president-biden-take-action-uphold-commitment-restore-balance-public-lands>)

Reality Check: Of the millions of acres of public land overseen by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) only 10% is conserved and/or available for public use, 90% is made available for oil and gas leasing, and 36 million acres are already locked up in leases to the fossil fuel industry. Of the 36 million acres currently under lease, only 35% is under production. “These wildlands are being kept under lease when they could instead be preserved for conservation.” (<https://www.wilderness.org/articles/article/open-business-and-not-much-else-analysis-shows-oil-and-gas-leasing-out-whack-blm-lands>)

To quote directly from the BLM official government website “Sales of oil, gas, and natural gas liquids produced from the Federal and Tribal mineral estate accounted for approximately 8 percent of all oil, 9 percent of all natural gas, and 6 percent of all natural gas liquids produced in the United States.” Meaning that more than 90% of oil and gas production occurs on private or state lands not affected by the pause on leasing. (<https://www.blm.gov/programs/energy-and-minerals/oil-and-gas/about>) The site also touts the amount of revenues generated by leasing and royalties. As we previously wrote, the revenues currently commanded are at decades old rates, pathetic giveaways of public lands to benefit

private companies, not the greater good of the US. In other words, the fees and royalties that we receive are well below fair market value, and we need to stop this borderline criminal giveaway of our natural bounty and heritage. (<https://www.eptrail.com/2021/01/17/it-is-time-to-update-fossil-fuel-subsidies/>)

As to jobs claims in the fossil fuel industry, Jessica Burley, Town Council member of Frisco, Colorado, points out in her January 30 editorial in The Colorado Sun ““Despite claims to the contrary, the vast majority of these sales create no jobs at all. Nationally between 2009 and 2018, 63% of acres leased by oil and gas corporations were simply stockpiled, and there are more than 10,000 permits to drill for oil .” (<https://coloradosun.com/2021/01/30/biden-oil-moratorium-opinion/>)

There will be no easy fix for the reality gap in our country. We can start by being judicious in our choice of information sources, learn better listening skills when it comes to conversations with our friends and neighbors, and understand that the shared goal is to pay forward a brighter future for ourselves and the next generations.

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