

Building Our Own Bridge

By [Michael Brune](#) February 28, 2020

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Photo by Kristiana Faddoul

[According to Gizmodo](#) reporter Brian Kahn, “The notion that natural gas is a bridge to a renewable future was first put in writing in 1979 by environmentalist Barry Commoner in his book *The Politics of Energy*. He called it a ‘bridge between the present, unsatisfactory reality and the still abstract, hoped-for future.’”

More than 40 years later, you can still hear politicians and industry lobbyists talk about that supposed bridge. But when we listen to the people who live with the impacts of the gas industry, it's clear that dirty fuels will never be a bridge to the “hoped-for future” they deserve.

The new [Regenerate California](#) campaign is a joint project of the Sierra Club, the California Environmental Justice Alliance, and groups within it, including Communities for a Better Environment, Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice, and Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy. It centers the experiences and aspirations of those whose homes and schools and churches sit next to fossil gas infrastructure. Our vision for the future includes clean air for all communities -- especially those that have had to inhale the fossil fuel industry's toxins for far too long. It includes a more democratic economy, where power and prosperity are distributed more equitably; good local jobs in green industries; and safety from climate chaos.

Fossil gas can't lead us to that future. Gas power plants make the air smoggy and dangerous to breathe. They emit pollutants linked to [myriad health problems](#), from asthma attacks to cancer. What's more, they disproportionately release these toxins in low-income communities and communities of color, where pollution burdens are already high. Here in California, for instance, half of the gas power plants [are located](#) in disadvantaged communities.

Fossil gas also won't help us escape catastrophic warming, as its backers have long claimed. It doesn't emit as much carbon dioxide as coal. But it emits so much methane -- a greenhouse gas 80 times more potent than CO2 -- that any benefit to the climate is [canceled out](#). While we're burning natural gas, we're still on track to suffer catastrophic impacts from climate change. We've already seen how those impacts fall most heavily on Californians who are [low-income](#), [elderly](#), [disabled](#), or [immigrants](#).

And fossil gas won't help us make our economy fairer or more inclusive. At this point, building out new fossil gas plants -- or extending existing plants' lives -- is nothing more than corporate welfare for the fossil fuel industry and wealthy utilities. According to the Rocky Mountain Institute, renewable energy portfolios are [already cheaper](#) than 90% of the gas projects currently proposed in the US -- and they're projected to get even cheaper every year. Keeping fossil gas on the line merely raises costs for families while keeping the same few executives rich.

Instead of corporate welfare, we need investments in renewable energy, meaningful and tangible support for workers transitioning out of the fossil fuel industry, and benefits for the communities that bear the brunt of the dirty energy economy. *That's* the bridge that will get us from our “present, unsatisfactory reality” to the future Californians deserve -- not fossil gas. The Sierra Club is proud to join with our environmental justice partners to begin to build it.

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Your article says "there's one way..." to stop gas usage, but there's none here. Those of us whose homes have natural gas stoves and water heaters would face expensive retooling and appliance purchases. Where is a good solution to this??

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Michael Winkler
Our highest priority needs to be to switch existing natural gas uses to renewable sources of electricity. If we put first emphasis on stopping drilling and fracking, we wil simply be exporting our problems out of state

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