Will California's Power Blackouts Affect Pennsylvania Voters - And The Election?

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In the midst of a Coronavirus pandemic, some of the hottest weather in recorded history, and massive wildfires, Californians are now dealing with another huge problem - roving power blackouts. Just when it matters the most, many Californians find themselves without power, and without much advanced knowledge of when, exactly where, and for how long the blackouts will continue.

This "Third Worldish" aspect to America's largest and most productive State is due to many factors, including simple incompetence and wishful thinking. Many other *Forbes* contributors have provided excellent articles and analysis about this. But no matter how much some in government and the media try to dismiss the point, the fact remains that the force feeding of renewable energy and premature over-reliance on it without natural gas is contributing significantly to the cause of what we are now seeing in California.

California has been one of the most aggressive states, both statewide and locally, not only in subsidizing competitors to fossil fuels, but also in banning such fuels altogether. For example, some cities like Berkeley, Palo Alto, and Mountain View have banned the use of natural gas in new buildings entirely. Others have placed substantial restrictions on gas.

As the *Wall Street Journal pointed out*, between 2014 and 2018 California reduced its consumption of electricity from natural gas-fired power plants by 21% while increasing its renewable energy consumption by 54%. Now, crunch time for California comes not during peak power usage but during the early evening, when solar and wind generation fall off.

In addition, massive subsidies to renewables have forced the closure of natural gas power plants for economic reasons. As a result, California doesn't have sufficient backup power when the supply drops, as it has lately. Without access to energy imported from neighboring states (who need it for their own usage during the heat wave) California power authorities really have no other choice but to institute blackouts.

While California's struggles are immediate, will they have a long term impact on other states where energy is a major issue, including here in Pennsylvania? The issue is already expected to have impact on the upcoming Presidential election. Incumbent Trump fully supports fracking and the use of fossil fuels. Candidate Biden has at best equivocated. But Biden's running mate, Kamala Harris, is on record as supporting a ban on fracking. Meanwhile, the Democratic left – whose steadfast support Biden still needs to defeat Trump – will continue to keep pushing the "Green New Deal," which demands an immediate transition away from fossil fuels.

Within ten years, Pennsylvania emerged from producing little energy to becoming the second largest producer of natural gas in the United States. While public opinion in Pennsylvania is very split about fracking, the practice is perhaps predictably more popular in the towns and other locations where it actually takes place. More importantly, the largest population center in the state, the City of Philadelphia and its environs in the southeast region, is overwhelmingly Democratic. The Green New Deal will not induce those voters to vote for Mr. Biden. They already will do so.

The Democratic ticket's stance on energy may, however, further induce the residents in Appalachia and the northeast part of the state – who defected in large numbers from Hilary Clinton in 2016 – to again vote against the party that may be perceived to want to take away their jobs, their royalty paychecks, and, by looking at California, even their security that they will have power when they need it.

Perhaps it is no surprise that the political dynamics of Pennsylvania have shifted in the last decade. The economics of the state now are completely different from those when Barrack Obama was elected in 2008. Despite a large environmental constituency, this past July Democratic Governor Tom Wolf signed bipartisan legislation that, among other things, gives tax breaks to manufacturers who use natural gas to make petrochemicals and fertilizers.

Governor Wolf understands that, in Pennsylvania, energy is a topic that cuts both ways. As California municipalities surge forward in banning or limiting natural gas while now facing roving blackouts, Democratic political strategists in Pennsylvania should be very concerned. These scenes from the west coast may play out on election day very poorly for them in regions like Joe Biden's birth city of Scranton and surrounding Northeast Pennsylvania, regions that Mr. Biden needs to reach the White House.

ATTORNEYS MENTIONED

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