

RUSSO: PennEast pipeline needed ASAP

Tony Russo - Sept. 12, 2017



Despite all of the sky-is-falling-rhetoric, three government agencies have found PennEast Pipeline is safe for the environment, the electric grid says it's needed for reliability, and federal data proves that underground pipelines are the safest way to move energy.

Natural gas has an important role to play beyond heating our homes and cooking our meals. It's often overlooked as the fuel that now powers more than half of New Jersey's electricity, with fewer emissions, greater reliability, and lower costs than traditional fuels.

Yet at every step of the process of writing a recent opinion piece maligning pipelines, the Asbury Park Press left out one important fact: Typing the editorial on a fully-charged computer, the mega-printing presses that placed it on thousands of newspapers, and customers reading it on their smart devices, all relied on electricity powered primarily from natural gas, delivered through pipelines.

Editors continue to ignore that natural gas use for electricity generation has doubled in New Jersey since 2005. That rise ties directly to a 13 percent drop in power sector carbon emissions over the same period.

The same is happening across the river in Pennsylvania, which once counted on coal plants for more than half its electricity, and whose air pollutants and particulate matter drifted east into the lungs of New Jersey families.

Two of the largest coal plants left in New Jersey were shuttered earlier this summer, not because of solar or wind power (which account for less than 2 percent of our total electric portfolio), but the low cost and abundance of clean, natural gas and the underground pipelines that deliver it.

That's an historic, environmental victory.

Regarding Gannett's criticism of the PennEast Pipeline, only in New Jersey could a regulatory process entering its fourth year of transparent and comprehensive review across more than 23 government agencies, be considered "fast-tracked" for approval, as the editorial board suggests. How ironic that just last year, this paper reported New Jersey had the worst business climate in America.

A recent expert analysis by the Boyd Company in — with total operating costs \$6 million less than New Jersey. The Garden State still today is among the top 10 states with the highest electricity costs. Pennsylvania's success, they say, is because of its embrace of low cost energy.

Businesses won't wait for us to get our act together, and will look past New Jersey for greener, more affordable pastures.

Our state and its leaders have a major choice to make. We can embrace the competitive and geographic advantage of accessing one of North America's largest and most affordable gas supplies which sit just over 100 miles from our borders to power our economy for decades. Or, we can become victims of an unrealistic and narrow political agenda that rejects pipelines completely— leaving us with higher bills, reduced reliability, and more jobs fleeing New Jersey.

PennEast Pipeline, proposed through six New Jersey towns along the Delaware River, is a state-of-the-art infrastructure project designed to access new gas supplies for local utilities and power plants to the benefit of 9 million residents, ensuring fuel supply security and diversity, cost savings, price stability, and more.

Therefore, its objectives are different than other pipelines proposed in the state, which are geared toward important, but more specific and localized, gas utility system reliability and redundancy, the conversion of coal plants to natural gas, or modernizing existing infrastructure.

Despite all of the sky-is-falling-rhetoric, three government agencies have found PennEast Pipeline is safe for the environment, the electric grid says it's needed for reliability, and federal data proves without a doubt that underground pipelines are the safest way to move the energy we all rely on every single day.

Federal regulators reviewed multiple alternative proposals, concluding that demand for the PennEast Pipeline was evident, and that gas capacity from existing pipeline systems could not be extended without causing increased environmental impact.

After three years, it's time to unleash the economic and environmental benefits of the PennEast Pipeline.

Tony Russo is president of the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey.