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Houston Chronicle

AS the Obama administration puts its boldly green imprint on U.S. energy policy, we encourage Washington policy-makers to continue listening closely to those many Houstonians and Texans who have done duty on the more conventional front lines of energy. The wisdom of hard, practical experience from years spent exploring for and developing new supplies of oil and natural gas is to be found here. This rich resource deserves a hearing as the administration attempts to reinvent the country's energy future.

One whose views rate particular attention is Rich Kinder, chairman and CEO of Kinder Morgan Energy Partners, the pipeline and energy storage company based here.

Kinder is a survivor if ever there was one. He navigated well clear of the troubles that would later afflict others in the leadership of Enron by leaving the doomed company and sticking to basics; in this case, pipelines and the other infrastructure that moves natural gas molecules and helps meet a large share of the country's power needs. As the value of "asset-light" Enron vanished into thin air a decade ago, Kinder was building a powerhouse from the very pipelines Enron's "smartest guys in the room" disdained.

In a recent piece for the Chronicle's Outlook page ("Attack carbon emissions using gas, nuclear power," Page B9, Thursday, July 9), Kinder offered nuts-and-bolts wisdom for lowering carbon emissions and dealing with the global warming issue. Much as many Americans would like to believe otherwise, he says, wind and solar alone won't do the job, at least for the foreseeable future. To get greener and cleaner, we'll need to expand our use of natural gas and nuclear power.

Kinder's conclusions are based on this hard energy math: Natural gas and nuclear power already supply about one-third of our energy, while wind and solar combined account for less than one-sixth of 1 percent. Even if we pour federal dollars into wind and solar, he argues, we won't get the return that enhanced investments in natural gas and nuclear would bring.

Kinder's op-ed should be required reading for White House policy-makers and members of Congress alike. While they're at it, the Washington decision-makers would do well to notice Exxon Mobil's high-tech efforts to tap abundant natural gas reserves trapped beneath the Colorado Rockies. Geologists for the

Irving-headquartered major estimate reserves in the 300,000 acres under lease in western Colorado at 45 trillion cubic feet, or roughly what the United States uses in two years, according to Chronicle energy reporter Kristen Hays ("Going deep in the Rockies," Page A1, Sunday, July 12).

The company has persisted with its efforts to develop the potentially enormous gas play in Colorado's Piceance Basin despite a global slump in demand that has sent prices tumbling from \$13 per cubic foot to \$3.50.

Kinder's Dutch uncle truth-telling and Exxon Mobil's massive commitment of dollars and human resources in Colorado make the point: We will need a serviceable bridge of conventional energy resources to reach the age when alternative energy really can power the U.S. economy.

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