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Why the OPA is wrong – Why a natural gas ban would hurt Maine. Natural Gas is Critical to Our Energy System today and in the Future.



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November 20, 2023

Open Immersive Reader

William Harwood, the appointed head of the Office of Public Advocate, has introduced a bill in the Maine Legislature to ban natural gas expansion in our state. This is short-sighted public policy and dangerous for Maine for a variety of reasons outlined below.

Costs and Jobs. Several years ago, Summit Natural Gas proposed a \$100m project to bring natural gas to the MidCoast. Consistent with Governor Mills’ Climate Plan (page 61,

<https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/file>

[s/inline-files/MaineWontWait_December2020.pdf](#)) Dragon Cement was interested in converting from petroleum coke, tires, carpet, and mattresses for their fuel, to a cleaner burning natural gas solution while also converting to homes and businesses along the system to a lower emissions, more affordable energy solution. Environmental activists and Rockland Town Council members were radically opposed to our plan. Not wanting to force our plans where we were not wanted, Summit abandoned our efforts. Fast forward three years, and Dragon Cement announced the closing of their Thomaston, ME facility. The company said they closed because they could not get access to natural gas

(<https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/09/12/news/midcoast/canceled-summit-natural-gas-line-dragon-cement-closure-joam40zk0w/#:~:text=The%20failed%202021%20midcoast%20gas,%2C%20Dragon's%20parent%20company%2C%20said.>)

This is just one example of how limited access to gas in Maine has cost jobs and industry. The OPA's proposed ban on new gas infrastructure could result in more industrial closings and will make it harder for Maine to continue to attract business to the state. Gas is affordable, reliable, and has lower emissions than other energy options. A policy proposal to prohibit gas expansion on the heels of Dragon's closing should give government officials pause. Why would Mr. Harwood advocate for a policy that has the demonstrated impact of closing industrial facilities and eliminating jobs?

Impact to Mainers. 2023 has been a difficult year financially for all Mainers. Interest rates are at 25-year highs. Inflation rates are at 40-year highs. In Maine fuel prices are critically high and increasing. According to the Governor's Energy Office, natural gas costs residential and commercial consumers less than any other fuel source except firewood (<https://www.maine.gov/energy/heating-fuel-prices>). Why in these tough economic times would the public's energy advocate support policies that would limit Mainer's energy choices and force them to more expensive solutions?

Electricity costs have increased significantly in Maine and are forecast to continue their steady rise

(<https://www.pressherald.com/2023/07/13/heres-why-electricity-bills-in-maine-are-getting-more-expensive-this-month/>). According to the chair of the Public Utilities Commission, a large part of electricity increases are “to begin the process of modernizing the grid for the load growth that we expect and to incorporate the distributed energy resources into our system.” The load growth is expected as the state pushes forward with policies that drive customers to utilize increasingly more electricity through the purchasing of electric cars, rebates for heat pumps, and policies like the OPA is proposing that limit energy choice by prohibiting gas access in communities that currently don’t have it. To keep up with demand, our electric utilities must build additional infrastructure, increasing costs.

In fact, ISO New England (the independent, not-for-profit corporation responsible for keeping electricity flowing across the six New England states and ensuring that the region has reliable, competitively priced wholesale electricity today and into the future) recently released a study that says that the region will need to spend \$26Billion to create a grid to realize a more electrified world that policymakers like Mr. Harwood, are pushing for.

(https://isonewswire.com/2023/11/02/iso-nes-2050-transmission-study-identifies-potential-costs-solutions-to-support-reliability-throughout-the-clean-energy-transition/?utm_source=isonewswire&utm_medium=newsfeed). Total costs will be much more as this study does not include the cost to build generators to replace the power generation the New England region will have to build to replace natural gas to meet Maine’s 100% clean electricity by 2040 goal.

Energy policy is hard and there are no silver bullets to addressing our energy need while also trying to transition to a low carbon future. We need to focus on resiliency, reliability, affordability, and climate. This policy from Maine’s public advocate does little to focus on what matters and instead is a knee-jerk policy proposal has no

proven impact on emissions reduction or strengthening
Maine’s energy system. We should reject it.

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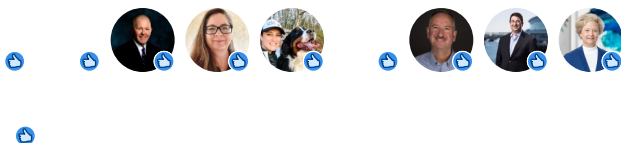
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Mainers have so much to gain from natural gas use. What a shame that
false rhetoric has dominated practical solutions for those of us who want a
strong economy AND environmental integrity in the state.

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