# **OPINION: Kern oil industry under siege; forgive us for covering it**

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**Body**

Sept. 07-- Sep. 7--Reader: No news organization more so than our hometown paper has glorified this issue (of state lawmakers' attention to the large, uncontrolled surface leak in western ***Kern*** County's Cymric ***Oil*** Field).

Why don't you just move on, John Cox? Find some serious pollution. Maybe focus on landfill emissions or possibly litter on our highways. This company (Chevron, which operates the field) does 1,000,000 more things for this community than your organization does.

There are legislative hearings regarding our industry on a frequent basis. Why is this one so important? Because it touches a hot point locally? -- Chad Hathaway

Price: Reporter John Cox has been closely monitoring the political storm swirling around the Cymric ***oil*** leak for the past two months, and not everyone here in ***oil*** country has been happy about the coverage. Cox's most recent article ("Lawmakers plan to convene hearing on Chevron ***oil*** releases in western ***Kern***," Sept. 4) drew another round of complaints, including this one from Hathaway, a prominent oilman and advocate for the industry.

Their conversation was mostly offline, but I'll summarize Cox's defense of his coverage, which I could not have enunciated any better:

"You seem to suggest that, if I ignore the issue, then it goes away. That all the lawmakers and environmentalists dead-focused on using this public-relations disaster out at Cymric to kill your industry will disappear. We'll bury our heads in the ground and everything will be just fine.

"It's my job to inform ***Kern*** County what's going on beyond its borders. Maybe it wasn't clear in the story, but I'm not the one convening this legislative hearing.

"If ***Kern*** County wants to sleep through this whole episode, maybe one day it'll wake up and find that things have changed drastically -- and ***Kern*** County will wonder what happened and why no one told the people who live here that their way of life is under attack.

"My words, my work, travel north and south. People read The Californian and begin to understand what ***oil*** means to this economy and how ***oil*** production and regulation is supposed to work. They read my stories and begin to question the line they're being fed by environmental activists telling them this event polluted drinking water.

"I was recently on the KCRW radio station in Santa Monica talking about this mess. The host could not wrap his mind around the concept that this event caused no environmental damage, which was contrary to what he'd been told by the environmental lobby. But I told him that and now Southern California knows it."

My 2 cents: The story of this ***oil*** leak and, more broadly, the state's plan to carry out what officials have termed a "managed decline" of the state's ***oil*** industry, is being covered by media across California. Many have assigned an environmental reporter to the story. We have assigned a business reporter -- Cox, our business editor.

He, unlike anyone else covering the story, understands the economic impact a significant decline in ***oil*** production will have in ***Kern*** County. He's not overlooking the political and environmental aspects of this story, but I challenge critics to find a more even-handed, pocket book-minded approach than what Cox is delivering.

When the state legislature convenes a hearing of the natural resources committees of both houses to look at an issue that affects ***Kern*** County more than any other part of California, it would be the height of irresponsibility for us to ignore it.

You're right about Chevron's contributions to the community, Chad. The company, which reported $141 billion in revenues in 2017, is perhaps ***Kern*** County's most generous corporate citizen. The Californian's corporate revenues, and levels of philanthropy, have been somewhat less.

----Reader: I read Robert Price's latest article about the homeless, dignity, and kindness ("Toilets and showers would be great, but dignity is in shortest supply," Aug. 25). I beg to differ. I grew up in a time when the only person that could give or take away your dignity was yourself. Continuing to feed, give clothes, give money, and a place to sleep does nothing to solving their plight. It is only enabling them to continue on the path they're on.

They need help from an organization that has the experience and trained personnel to change their lives, and they must want to change their lives.

I grew up in a time when the only person that could give or take away your dignity was yourself. There's a Bible scripture, 2 Thessalonians 3:10, that says, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." Find someone who's been on drugs and homeless and that has turned their life around and ask them how they came to change their lives. It might open your eyes.

-- Susan Baker

Price: And I beg to differ with you -- on several counts. Of course providing food and a place to sleep does not, by themselves, solve the plight of the homeless. I did not even remotely suggest they would. Did you read past the headline?

I made several very specific recommendations, including broadening opportunities for methadone therapy to help lift addicts from the bonds of drug abuse and creating housing programs that afford homeless people the chance to get a general equivalency diploma or trade certificate. That's how you imbue people with dignity: You give them purpose. You teach them to fish.

And, just as you say, those programs and services must be provided by an organization that has the experience and trained personnel to provide them. What other sort of sponsorship might have I been suggesting?

If I were to ask a formerly homeless person how he came to change his life, as you recommend, I expect he would say that he escaped addiction, got a job, and, as a result, regained his self-esteem.

When was this time you speak of, Susan, that the only person who could give or take away your dignity was yourself? Of course we are our own best source of dignity, but history is full of examples of other forces -- cruel governments, discriminatory cultures and traumatic life events, to name three -- that can strip people of their dignity. That doesn't mean homeless people's circumstances are always someone else's fault. They're not. But I wouldn't assume that others' stories are as easy, straightforward or trauma-free as yours or mine.

----Reader: In your Sept. 4 column, "Lamont High proponents have a new strategy," you quote proponents who refer to other cities where the elementary school district and the high school district came together such as in McFarland, Farmersville and Tehachapi.

What's different in each of these cases is that there was an existing high school in each of these communities. In Lamont's case, they want to take the Lamont kids away from the ***Kern*** High School District but don't have a school to place them in. Robert Price also failed to mention that unification attempts have been tried in the last couple of years at both Shafter and Wasco and both attempts went down to failure. Why? Because it's very difficult to work through the process to merge and change finances, staffing, union negotiations, just to scratch the surface.

If the residents of Lamont want to unify, where will the high school students be housed and who will be paying to build that new high school? Where will those Lamont high school students attend school until the new school is being built? Will those Lamont students have the same access to programs that the ***Kern*** High School District offers such as ROC, sports, etc.?

-- Bako Guy

Price: Yep. You are correct. All good questions that I didn't answer. But I could have covered all of those story angles thoroughly and there still would have been other unreported details. That's the nature of a newspaper column. I have 800 words and a finite amount of time to cover as many bases as I can. The good news is, we will continue to follow this story.

Contact The Californian's Robert Price at 661-395-7399, rprice@bakersfield.com or on Twitter: @stubblebuzz. His column appears on Sundays, Wednesdays and Saturdays; the views expressed are his own.

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