# **Robert Price: Is the end of Kern oil production really upon us? Sure sounds like it**

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**Body**

Aug. 10-- Aug. 10--Our days as a capital of crude ***oil*** production are numbered -- California is seeing to that. ***Kern*** County hasn't reached the end of the road but the signpost is visible on the horizon. T-intersection ahead: Prepare to make a choice.

In no uncertain terms, Gov. Gavin Newsom has made clear that this nation-state will continue working toward a carbon-neutral future, and next up is the elimination of the practices and institutions that inhibit that quest.

"That's California's identity," Newsom said during a visit last month to the site of a west ***Kern*** ***oil*** spill. "It's who we are. It's what we do better than anyone else."

Indeed it is. California has been working toward a green economy on several fronts for years. Then, last month, a bold stroke: Newsom put his signature on a state budget that includes $1.5 million to study a managed decline of the state's ***oil*** production.

That is to say, a managed decline of ***Kern*** County's most important industry, apart from farming.

Many will cheer Newsom's larger objective, and some will sneer, but the fact is, without a suitable replacement, shutting down the California ***oil*** industry will devastate the economy of a region that is already among the state's poorest.

It's not enough for anyone to declare that ***Kern*** County leaders must dedicate their efforts to the diversification of this economy. That is a given. ***Kern*** County must identify a champion newcomer of depth and potential, and pursue it.

Some will point to logistics -- warehousing, to translate -- but those jobs are not high-paying, certainly not in the six-figure orbit of ***oil*** industry jobs. And since logistics relies on heavy truck traffic, it is not environmentally friendly and therefore runs counter to the whole purpose of this grand undertaking by California.

If the state taketh away, so must it give.

Newsom's green government must help local leaders lure a dynamic replacement to Bakersfield. Computer manufacturing. Biotechnology research. Semiconductor development. Something.

Or, most appropriately, renewable energy research, development and manufacturing, which already have important footholds here.

All of those industries will require investments in education -- new or enhanced programs at Bakersfield College, Cal State Bakersfield and other regional institutions that can train workers for these new employers.

Would state-level tax breaks be enough to attract a player, or players, of such scale that the pain of a diminished ***oil*** industry might be sufficiently eased? That's hard to imagine. We'll need more than that.

Public-private partnerships, already common in infrastructure development, are worthy of discussion. Could such a model translate to rooted, brick-and-mortar workplaces built to a new industry's specifications? I don't know if the framework for an undertaking like that exists yet. Creating one would have to be a task for our legislators, state and federal.

This "managed decline" study, underway now under the auspices of the University of California, will "evaluate pathways to achieve a carbon neutral economy by 2045, manage the decline of in-state production as the state's fossil fuel demand decreases, and assess potential impacts to disadvantaged and low-income communities and strategies to address those impacts."

That study must assess potential impacts to every tier of this broader community because, no matter how one might otherwise feel about it, the fabric of the ***Kern*** County ***oil*** industry envelops everything from education and social services to commercial and leisure.

The ***Kern*** County ***oil*** industry employs about 10,000 people directly, and an additional 30,000 work in associated jobs. But Sacramento's "managed decline" of the industry wouldn't just affect employment levels and its trickle-down effect on the community's overall quality of life. It would affect our very safety.

***Oil*** company holdings are one of county government's top sources of property tax revenue. As we have seen in ***Kern*** County in recent years, even a marginal dip in the value of those lands, due primarily to low ***oil*** prices, can result in drastic decreases in public services, including law enforcement.

Environmentalists want to see the state's ***oil*** extraction business shut down sooner rather than later, but Newsom needs to reiterate that the state's economy still runs on fossil fuels and will for years to come. Try finding a charging station for your Tesla off the I-5 exit at Avenal: The infrastructure is not here, and it's not close. Meanwhile, the ***oil*** pumped out of ***Kern*** County wells is subject to some of the most stringent environmental regulations in the world. Turning off the pumps in the southern San Joaquin just so California can turn to foreign exporters with dirtier extraction practices makes no sense.

Newsom is aware of all this, of course.

"Before we do anything precipitously, before we do anything audaciously, (vulnerable people need to know) that we have their back and that we have something better that's more (economically) significant than what we have today," he said during that ***Kern*** County stop on July 24.

"I want to be very honest with people that we're not going to leave anyone behind," he said.

Should we take him at his word? In his first State of the State address in February, Newsom gave the Central Valley an encouraging shout-out.

"Merced, Fresno, Bakersfield and communities in between are more dynamic than many realize," Newsom said. "The valley may be known around the world for agriculture, but there is another story ready to be told."

We're all ears, Governor. This would be a good time to tell it.

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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