

# Doyle: Getting this right

By Carrie Doyle  
Sunday, September 28, 2008

Colorado is ground zero for both sides of the energy debate currently raging in Washington. We are a leader in the new energy economy--recruiting new businesses and bringing thousands of new, clean energy jobs to the state. Through political and business leadership, we've diversified our energy supply and reduced global warming pollution. On the other side of the energy debate is the call to "drill, baby, drill" .

Here in Colorado, we are drilling more. Oil and gas drilling has increased six fold over the past decade and experts project another 120,000 wells in the coming three decades. That's like replacing every person in Boulder with a natural gas well. This drilling boom will likely outlast my lifetime, but, eventually, it will end. There are three actions we need take as Coloradans to manage this boom responsibly.

The first imperative is that we manage our oil and gas boom responsibly so that fifty years from now our drinking water supplies are clean, our towns in the gas patch are healthy, and critical wildlife habitat is intact. Many basic protections for our water, wildlife, and public health are now under consideration by the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission. Now is the time, at the front end of this drilling boom, to create clear rules and guidelines so that oil and gas companies know what is expected of them as responsible corporate citizens of Colorado.

Secondly, we need to make sure that the oil and gas industry pays its fair share. For the privilege of being able to sell the natural gas and other fuels that lie underneath Colorado, oil and gas companies are asked to pay a severance tax -a one time payment to Coloradans for the loss of this finite resource. The trouble is, oil and gas companies pay less in severance taxes in Colorado than in our neighboring states of Wyoming and New Mexico. A lot less. By deducting the property taxes they pay from their severance tax bill, oil and gas companies get a massive tax subsidy that no other industry in the state gets.

Oil and gas companies are right now spending millions on television ads decrying an initiative that will end this tax subsidy and bring the oil and gas industry's tax rate more closely in line with surrounding states (though still below the levels paid in Wyoming and New Mexico). Coloradans have a choice to make on this November's ballot, and I hope they will choose to vote yes on Amendment 58 and end this tax subsidy to the most profitable industry in the world.

My third hope is that the most precious and unique places in Colorado--places like the Roan Plateau and Vermillion Basin--are left untouched so future generations can experience the best of Colorado. Right now much of Colorado's Western Slope is in the crosshairs of the Bush Administration's final days. The energy policies developed in secret by Dick Cheney seven years ago have brought us sky-high energy prices, record oil and gas company profits, and investigations of the very regulators who were supposed to be overseeing our oil and gas resources, but who were instead participating in an embarrassing, and criminal, mockery of the responsibilities we entrusted in them. Before it's too late, let's set aside these few places that are unique to the world and protect them from drilling today.

Here in Colorado we are at a crossroads, we have tremendous opportunities with the new energy economy, and we have enormous responsibilities to manage this oil and gas boom well. Let's take our responsibilities seriously -- we can continue to be energy producers to the nation and policy and technology leaders for the world, but we also must serve as stewards for generations to come.

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