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Comment: Fossil fuels aren't going anywhere anytime soon, but they are going green

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Comments



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Electricity is not the only way to lower greenhouse gas emissions, the author argues.

The climate and health debate has forced Americans to consider their personal impact on the environment. What fuel powers the plane you flew on for your summer vacation? What about the Amazon delivery truck that dropped off your last package or the backup generator that provides you with energy security? What about the school bus that transports your children to and from school?

Most of them are likely running on gasoline, diesel and propane, which is already a low carbon fuel and produces very few nitrogen oxides. Now these fuels are getting greener thanks to breakthrough formulations in the areas of sustainable aviation fuel, renewable diesel and renewable propane. Refineries around the country are being refitted to use feedstocks like field crop stover, animal tallow, used cooking oils and camelina seed oil — a flowering plant grown in a dozen states — to produce renewable fuels.

Using waste products to make biofuels is the type of creative thinking and tech innovation that will allow fleets to transition to cleaner fuels more quickly without risking performance or affordability. Conventional propane is already a cleaner option than electricity and other liquid fuels, and renewable propane has an even smaller carbon footprint.

The recently announced Inflation Reduction Act is expected to help the United States cut greenhouse gas emissions roughly 40 percent below 2005 levels by the end of this decade. Energy experts, however, agree that more must be done to meet the goal of cutting emissions in half by 2030. The greatest obstacle to achieving the goal is not a lack of innovation, but the belief that there is only one path to that future.

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We're at a critical juncture when it comes to addressing climate change, and the electrification movement alone isn't going to get us there. There are literally hundreds of startups and established businesses investing billions of dollars to innovate new products that will decarbonize our planet.

The private sector has recognized that carbon intensity is the ultimate issue. Carbon intensity measures the total amount of carbon emissions associated with the creation of power. Surprisingly, the electric grid so many believe is the single solution to climate change has one of the highest carbon intensity measures. It will be decades before this is no longer true ... so what to do in the midst of climate urgency?

The answer is to replace everything — carbon-generated electricity, gasoline, diesel, coal, coke and more — that carries a high carbon intensity with a low- or zero-carbon intensity alternative. Thanks to innovation already in play, we can

do this today, and renewable propane is just one way to move forward. It is remarkably low carbon, and in certain blends, can even be carbon positive, that is, below zero in its carbon intensity.

Propane is used every day by millions of Americans for backyard grilling, water heating, medium- and heavy-duty transportation, farming, forklifts, and as a primary and backup power for homes and businesses. Renewable propane can do exactly the same with zero change-out cost. That's the kind of innovation that creates true sustainability — low carbon at a low cost.

As billions of dollars in federal tax credits get distributed for electric vehicles and renewable energy resources, let's not forget that renewable fuels offer the same, if not better, emissions reducing value and at an affordable price. Consumers should be made aware of all emissions reducing fuels and demand a wider path approach to addressing climate change.

Tucker Perkins is president and CEO of the Propane Education and Research Council.