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Media Coverage of Natural Gas in Residential Homes

“Democracy requires an active and informed citizenry.”

– President Barack Obama

“The more homeowners were targeted, the more they wanted to understand what was behind the government decreed, all-electric mandates and overreaching reach codes. Politicos and green new deal extremists, opponents of single family homeowners, couldn't have been more wrong in how to silence those who disagree with them.”

– Sonoma County homeowners and property taxpayers, as relayed by many readers to author during 2020

Kathryn Reed, a reporter for the *North Bay Business Journal* interviewed me on December 28, 2020. She is one of the lucky members of society, during these times of unprecedented lockdowns, who can perform her job remotely. Her task at hand: to write “an overall story of the pros/cons of natural gas; the good/bad of why new construction should/should not have gas or be all electric.” It’s an ambitious project, but she acquitted herself well, with a balanced look at the issue of banning natural gas across the North Bay [1].



Graphic courtesy NBBJ, January 4, 2021

During our interview, I offered the following as a homeowner who rebuilt in 2018:

1. *The Big Picture*: A poster I had previously shared with Sonoma County municipalities advocating NO natural gas bans and avoiding bad public policy in the form of residential rooftop solar systems. Residents should expect choice in their energy supply, cost-effective housing unburdened by all-electric mandates, and resiliency. Natural gas bans would destroy all of these basic needs.

2. *Devil in the details*: I highlighted the California Energy Commission's *incorrect* gas appliance savings of \$6,171 for new home construction, touted by both Sonoma Clean Power and the Sierra Club, for example. There is no gas appliance cost savings for new home construction, but rather, a higher cost by at least \$29,529 for all-electric appliances inside an all-electric house. Even so, reporter Reed included a Sierra Club quote, touting the discredited savings figure. Keith Wood, NCBE's CEO is less aggressive than me, citing a more moderate cost increase of \$5,000 to \$10,000 to build an all-electric house.

3. *Bad Public Policy Forced on Homeowners by Unelected State Bodies*: Mandating rooftop solar is the epitome of bad public policy. John Lowry, a member of the Sonoma County Planning Commission and a retired executive director of Burbank Housing, in his November 2019 paper, argued that in terms of renewable energy deployment, utility-scale solar is the way to go, not rooftop solar. Reporter Reed avoided getting into government policy issues in her piece.

4. *Resiliency is the watchword*: Sustainability is *not* resiliency. Sustainability is *not* reliability. Sonoma County touts *resilience*, which I agree with. One of the better ways to achieve this is employing back-up natural gas generators, which can be deployed at lower cost and provide superior, long-term resiliency over the much-touted solar+battery backup option. There are significant cost-savings for homeowners, practical benefits for using natural gas backup that support resiliency, and no sacrifice of garage space, which would be required for solar plus battery systems. It's disappointing that Sonoma County refuses to provide homeowner credits for resiliency related to natural gas backup solutions [2].

5. *Widespread solar raises electricity prices for everyone*: Economists present the whole picture [3], that the higher cost of electricity should reflect "the costs that renewables impose on the generation system, including those associated with their intermittency, higher transmission costs, and any stranded asset costs assigned to ratepayers." For California ratepayers, additional costs are being assigned in a continuous stream of

rate hikes for wildfire mitigation, vegetation management, weather stations, a helicopter and drone inspection fleet, and more. Reporter Reed avoided getting into the cost to deliver electricity issues in her piece, other than highlight that “going all-electric today is likely to be an expensive proposition” for new home buyers.

6. Promotion of all-electric technology based on faulty data: I challenged the *New Buildings Institute* and its promotional campaign regarding the cost of heat pump water heaters (HPWHs). Their data is suspect and they’ve gone silent on the challenges made. I talked with one of their directors on a number of occasions to secure updated information for California residents. I’m still waiting. The bottom line, the operating cost of an all-electric water heater or HPWH is typically \$542, more than double the cost of operating a natural gas water heater (\$252), according to NBI’s own table-based calculations, not the touted and actively promoted value of \$227. Both initial first cost and operating costs, using natural gas-based water heaters (tanked or tankless), are more cost-effective to heat water in the home than being forced to install an HPWH.

7. California’s compliance and conversion climate: A four-page detailed analysis of the costs for most homeowners of already built homes to convert to all-electric was provided, “Incremental Single Family Residence Costs—During a Forced Implementation of a Natural Gas Ban.” I believe that most homeowners are unawares of such policies coming down the pipeline from the State and its unelected commissioners pushing for compliance and conversion. They literally argue that they know better than anyone else.

8. The state’s unelected “experts” want every homeowner to invest in only all-electric construction: All-electric construction demands under-sized rooftop solar systems to be installed on all new homes built. This technology only operates part time. For electrical generation, in general, these variable renewable resources only work for a short percentage of the time. Geothermal production (also renewable), natural gas plants, and nuclear power plants operate “continuously.” On average, there are only 260 sunny days per year in Sonoma County. The U.S. average is less, only 205 sunny days. Sonoma County receives some form of precipitation, on average, 75 of the other 105 days per year. This means that rooftop Solar PV power generation occurs only 28 percent of the time. The remaining 72 percent is idle downtime, where no energy production occurs. This best case number, 28%, excludes localized losses of solar production due to wildfire smoke and falling ash, which in Sonoma County took out almost two months of solar production during August, September, and October 2020.

Reporter Reed asked me, “Why are you doing this advocacy work? What group are you with?”

I'm not with any group. I'm a private citizen who has never worked for a government entity. I believe my children and grandchildren should be able to afford housing. California may not be the place for them. One has already left the Golden State for Virginia where housing costs are significantly better. My other two children are also looking to leave the state and they're studying the costs of living in both Georgia and Florida.

Resiliency is another reason to fight these onerous mandates. After losing our home in the Tubbs fire, we decided to install a cost-effective, whole-house, natural gas backup generator to overcome multi-day PSPS electric shutdowns, electric grid failures, and rotating blackouts. It has worked like a charm to date and our natural gas generator proved invaluable during those multi-day PSPSs.

It's also the right thing to do. People want to live their lives and not have their liberties or property rights absconded by overpaid bureaucrats unaware of what it takes to raise a family or pay their own way in life.

"My concern is that I will be under attack by those who would like to maintain group think by demonizing dissent . . . and go still further by compromising science in favor of identity politics."

– One conservative viewpoint, circa 2020

Gas is a Better Commodity than Electricity . . .

"Gas could be stored, which made it possible to produce in an orderly, rational basis like other manufactured products. It could maintain reserves to meet peak requirements and level out demand over a twenty-four-hour period. Not so electricity. It had to be produced, sold, delivered, and used all at once, which meant that the plant supplying it needed the capacity to deliver the total maximum load demanded by customers at any given moment."

– Maury Klein, historian, quoted in *The Grid*, p.62, explaining Thomas Edison's error in using the gas industry as a model for electricity

[1] [Nixing natural gas: Burning debate hits the North Bay](#), Kathryn Reed, *NBBJ*, January 4, 2021, pp. 4, 5, 22.

[2] One business in Cloverdale, a Chevron gas station, recently installed a 100kW natural gas backup generator to keep vehicles moving during an electrical outage, planned or unplanned. ASCO Power Technologies, acquired by Schneider Electric in 2017, is responsible for its support and continued operation.



Photo courtesy R.K. Koslowsky

[3] Solar panel and component pricing has dropped, which has been good for installations during the past decade. However, electricity prices had to increase, due to the variable nature of solar (and wind resources), which is bad for those with a high electric usage, and especially ominous for those with an all-electric home. This concern is underscored in a 2019 study discussing the unreliable nature of solar (and wind), which makes electricity more expensive. A team of economists from the University of Chicago found that Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) "significantly increase average retail electricity prices, with prices increasing by 11% (1.3 cents per kWh) seven years after the policy's passage into law and 17% (2 cents per kWh) twelve years afterward." In California, these increases in electricity rates are much higher. In fact, to add insult to injury, new homeowners of these experimental all-electric homes saw their utility bills increase by a further \$172 during 2020. Electric rates were already increased by 2.7% as of January 1st and then increased another 8.8% on August 1st. This translated into an additional \$132 increase for all homeowners' electric bills in addition to the \$40 annual increase started in January. More rate increases for electricity arrived on January 1st, another 9.2 percent for Sonoma Clean Power customers. Meanwhile, PG&E customers saw a decrease in their natural gas rates.

[4] In this submission, the fourth of four 1-pagers is attached, highlighting the advantages of natural gas cooktops over induction cooktops. Previously, the advantages of furnaces over heat pumps for space heating was presented, natural gas dryers over their electric counterparts was offered, and natural gas water heaters over heat pump water heaters was highlighted.

Advantages of Natural Gas Cooktops Over Induction Ones

Availability (which could be “fixed” through government decree telling stores what to sell)

Lower appliance cost

No need to purchase new pots or pans

Operates during a power outage for cooking and boiling water

No electric-magnetic fields, which some believe to be a health hazard

Lower heat emission and better temperature control

No indoor air quality issues if range hood is properly installed

Digital meat thermometers don’t work (so, find your analog thermometer)

Spare parts availability and greater reliability

Gas cooktops have been, on average, about **\$900 less costly** than induction cooktops.

“It is true that electric water heaters and induction cooktops will **not** be working in a power failure . . . most older models of gas stoves **can be lit** manually during a power outage . . .” – BayRen

[RKK: My 2018 KitchenAid gas cooktop was used during PG&E’s numerous PSPS]

“Lack of energy diversity removes individual choice and independence.”

Reference: Over-reaching Reach Codes – A Summary Defending Natural Gas Appliances, R.K. Koslowsky, 2020

Rob Koslowsky

Author of [The Tubbs Fire.](#)

Also author of *The Upstart Startup* & *Breach of Trust.*

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