

## Energy an Economic Winner; Let's Not Stop Now

The Times Leader Article  
Publication Date October 31, 2020

*Larry Merry*  
*Executive Director*  
*Belmont County Port Authority*

There's no doubt that the presidential election between President Donald Trump and Vice President Joe Biden will be full of political fireworks. There's also no doubt that, whatever the outcome, Ohio's energy sector will feel the impact.

By now, Ohioans are used to the attention surrounding presidential elections. After all, our state is a strong bellwether for presidential elections and our eighteen electoral votes are a tempting prize for candidates. But it's Ohio's status as a major energy player, not an electoral prize, that should be garnering more attention. The natural gas resources being developed in state, including major projects like the Belmont County cracker plant, are a key ingredient to American energy security.

Unfortunately, Ohioans at the moment can't rest easy that all candidates fully back Ohio's energy industry. Because of party politics, Vice President Joe Biden has been pushed left of President Obama's 'all of the above' energy strategy into a policy platform that leaves many questions unanswered, especially when it comes to natural gas. For example, Biden has already promised to ban natural gas leasing and operations on federal lands, with many wondering whether Biden might adopt even more extreme measures if he wins the White House.

This leaves many Ohioans uneasy. The reality is that a ban on federal leasing is the most complete use of Presidential authority to stop natural gas development on federal lands. If a Biden Administration is comfortable using that degree of leverage, what will stop the Administration from pursuing policies that slow or stifle natural gas development on private lands?

With that in mind, Vice President Biden would do well to acknowledge a recent poll <<https://www.api.org/~media/Files/Policy/American-Energy/2020/Morning-Consult-Ohio-Summer-2020.pdf>> from Morning Consult that shows high support for natural gas and a strong preference limits on its development. Of those voters polled, three quarters <<https://www.api.org/~media/Files/Policy/American-Energy/2020/Morning-Consult-Ohio-Summer-2020.pdf>> say the coronavirus has badly damaged Ohio's economy and a majority <<https://www.api.org/~media/Files/Policy/American-Energy/2020/Morning-Consult-Ohio-Summer-2020.pdf>> say the natural gas and oil industry will play an important role in recovery. Even more telling is that two-thirds <<https://www.api.org/~media/Files/Policy/American-Energy/2020/Morning-Consult-Ohio-Summer-2020.pdf>> of Ohio voters, including a majority of Democrats, say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports access to American oil and gas.

Voters are right to recognize the value and power of natural gas. Because of vast reserves in the Utica Shale, Ohio natural gas production today is an astonishing thirty times [higher than it was in 2012](https://www.eia.gov/state/?sid=OH). Ohio produced just over 2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in 2017, helping the state in recent years generate [more of our in-state electricity from natural gas than from coal for the first time](https://www.eia.gov/state/?sid=OH). These are big wins for the economy, with a 2017 study [by the American Petroleum Institute showing that more than 260,000 Ohio jobs were supported by natural gas and oil and contributed some \\$37.9 billion in economic activity](https://www.api.org/news-policy-and-issues/news/2017/08/01/ohio-jobs-supported-by-natural-gas-and-o).

Families and businesses benefit, too, with the Consumer Energy Alliance [finding that Ohioans saved more than \\$40.2 billion in commercial and residential energy bills from 2006 to 2016, the heart of the natural gas revolution](https://consumerenergyalliance.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/080718_OH-CFAE-Natural-Gas-Report_FINAL.pdf). With more disposable income, consumers are able to inject money into different parts of the economy rather than sinking their earnings into energy bills.

As director of the Belmont County Port Authority I have seen all these benefits first hand. Economic activity and investment is up. Plentiful and affordable energy also draws businesses into our area. Notably, the ethane cracker plant that PTT Global Chemical America has proposed for Belmont County is expected [to generate between five and six thousand construction jobs and another 600 permanent, high-paying jobs once operational](https://www.theintelligencer.net/news/top-headlines/2020/08/new-deputy-energy-secretary-visits-proposed-cracker-plant-site-in-belmont-county).

Recently, Mark W. Menezes, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Energy, who visited the Belmont County plant, remarked [“We want this project to continue moving forward. We want it to move forward because it will create jobs right here in Belmont County. We want it to move forward because it will strengthen American energy security. And we want it to move forward because of its broader economic development potential for the region.”](https://www.theintelligencer.net/news/top-headlines/2020/08/new-deputy-energy-secretary-visits-proposed-cracker-plant-site-in-belmont-county/)

Like all natural gas development, the ethane cracker plant will be a major development for our area and can help strengthen Ohio manufacturing by making feedstock materials plentiful and accessible. But this can only happen if our national leaders continue to stand behind the future of natural gas, both on federal lands and private. Energy was the industry that put Ohio on the map in the 19th century. We should embrace natural gas and move our economy forward.