

THE HILL

Climate leaders don't frack

OPINION

By Bill Snape and Rose Braz

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The Golden State's Gov. Jerry Brown is making a rare appearance in Washington this week at a conference that will discuss climate change just as California's visionary climate policies are coming under assault from an unexpected quarter: Brown himself.

Brown will be speaking at a conference organized by the Center for American Progress, "featuring high-level discussions of critical policy issues and the bold ideas needed to tackle them," but he's probably not going to talk about the disturbing prospect of California becoming the dirty oil capital of the world.

The "critical policy issue" Brown is facing at home: The estimated 15 billion barrels of oil in the state's Monterey Shale formation that can only be extracted through fracking, acidization, and other dangerously extreme methods.

The "bold idea" he should undertake: Keep the oil in the soil by banning the method called hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, in California.

At four times the size of the Bakken formation in the Northwest, California's Monterey

Shale is our nation's largest shale oil reserve. Brown has spoken up in support of producing this oil. If he continues to support fracking, he will light the fuse on a carbon bomb that will shatter our state's valiant efforts to fight global warming. And, yes, that's the same Jerry Brown who just a few short months ago joined more than 500 scientists from 40 countries in calling for urgent action on climate change.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's recent report reiterates what the International Energy Agency (IEA) and others have been saying for a while now. To have a decent chance of avoiding the worst impacts of climate change, we have to leave most fossil fuels buried safely in the Earth.

In 2012, the IEA estimated that two-thirds of all fossil fuel reserves need to be left in the ground if we are to prevent more than 2 degrees Celsius of global warming.

We know that California's existing oil and gas production already releases large volumes of methane, a dangerously potent greenhouse gas. A study published this year in the *Journal of Geophysical Research* found that the methane leak rate from Los Angeles-area oil and gas operations was 17 percent, a rate that makes these fuels far worse for the climate than coal. Widespread

fracking in California will only worsen this dangerous problem.

But fracking has spread across the state in recent years, and an Associated Press investigation recently revealed that oil companies have even fracked hundreds of times in California's fragile coastal waters near Huntington Beach and other areas rich with wildlife, all with little to no oversight from state or federal regulators.

In addition to the methane that accompanies fracking, combustion of the 15 billion barrels of oil in the Monterey Shale would produce roughly 6 billion tons of carbon pollution, the equivalent of what the entire United States emits over one full year.

And California largely produces dirty, heavy crude. As energy expert Robert Collier recently pointed out, the California Air Resources Board scores many of California's oil fields as about as carbon intensive as the oil extracted from the Alberta tar sands. Collier concluded: "[T]he success of California's landmark climate policies are clearly at stake."

On fracking, Brown is out of step with the California electorate. Polls show 58 percent of the state wants a moratorium on the practice. If Brown values his legacy as a climate leader, he needs to halt fracking in California. The governor needs to face facts: Climate leaders don't frack.

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