

# The Register-Guard

GUEST VIEWPOINT

## Merkley wisely changes course on Coos Bay LNG project

BY TIM PALMER

*For The Register-Guard*

DECEMBER 30, 2017

In early December, Sen. Jeff Merkley announced that he opposes construction of the Jordan Cove liquefied natural gas plant in Coos Bay and the pipeline that would cut across 230 miles of Oregon to serve the export of fossil fuel.

Our senator has shown the kind of level-headed analysis, commitment to truth and states- manlike leadership that's essential if our nation is to address the most critical problem we face. That problem is global warming, which is destined to raise the sea level at our coastal communities, to intensify today's catastrophic fires, to breed storms and floods like never before seen, to acidify our oceans, to cripple commercial fisheries and to make shadowy memories of our iconic salmon — all inevitable unless we do something corrective now.

For five years, the senator saw value in the LNG project and was willing to let the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's process for permitting it "play out." But now he recognizes that "the project has changed and the world has changed.... The question isn't whether we need to build infrastructure ... but whether this large-scale fossil fuel project still makes sense."

Critics of the LNG scheme have long held that landowners in the pipeline's right-of-way are threatened by condemnation of their property to serve a dangerous

facility being built to export American resources to Asia solely for a foreign corporation's private profit.

With global warming in mind, some people, including the senator, thought that burning gas would be better than burning coal. But new data show that gas is likely worse, owing to the ubiquitous atmospheric escape of methane. This is now even more problematic, as the Trump administration is axing methane regulations.

Furthermore, the LNG plant's promise of a modest 140 continuing jobs in Coos Bay will be far surpassed by new employment in renewable energy industries that will relieve — rather than exacerbate — global warming.

Not to mention that LNG plants rank among the most volatile and dangerous facilities built by man.

This one would sit at sea level in the country's most active magnitude-9 earthquake zone, where tsunamis of Fukushima scale are assured.

But back to the senator, who concluded, "Like other large-scale fossil fuel projects, Jordan Cove will contribute massively to pollution that is profoundly damaging to our state and our world. Generations from now, our grandchildren will wonder why we continued to burn fossil fuels when the catastrophic consequences were so evident."

Merkley's view is especially welcome now that FERC is filled with appointees of the Trump administration, which has promised full-throttle support for gas-burning, for export of American resources, and for the land-condemning pipelines that serve the industry. Letting the federal process "play out" now means rubber-stamping maximum fossil fuel incineration of every kind.

Other elected officials near and far should have Merkley's foresight and courage. And officials responsible at the state level need to consider how the problems, the justifications and the legacies of a Jordan Cove LNG debacle will haunt the future of all Oregonians, for generations to come, if that project is allowed to proceed.

*Tim Palmer of Port Orford is the author of "Rivers of Oregon," "Field Guide to Oregon Rivers" and other books.*

<http://registerguard.com/rg/opinion/36288083-78/merkley-wisely-changes-course-on-coos-bay-lng-project.html.csp>