

January 25, 2024, Santa Barbara, CA

***What More Should the United States Do to Address the Climate Crisis?***

Hearing sponsored by CEC and CPRI

Comments by Katie Davis

*Chair, Sierra Club Santa Barbara-Ventura Chapter & Vice-Chair of Sierra Club California; Community advisory member of Santa Barbara APCD & Central Coast Community Energy (3CE) CCA*

The California central coast was the first place in the world where we drilled for oil offshore. We have over a hundred years' experience with oil. We've had massive oil spills that shut down beaches and fisheries, ruined tourism, killed animals, destroyed habitats, and an entire town (Avila) had to be rebuilt. We have a superfund site with permanently contaminated groundwater, leaking oil wells that were never plugged, some of the most energy and GHG-intensive forms of unconventional oil production in the world, and oil drilling through critical groundwater aquifers that supply drinking water to some of our largest cities, like Santa Maria. An EPA audit 13 years ago found many illegal injections outside of EPA-approved exemption boundaries, that still persist to this day. New and expanded aquifer exemptions are proposed.

- **The EPA should not allow California regulators to expand aquifer exemptions and should shut down illegal injections. For instance, no Cat Canyon expansion that would facilitate dangerous oil development.**
- **The EPA could also study the risks to water from existing fossil fuel operations and step up enforcement of the Safe Drinking Water Act.**
- **Stop leasing federal lands and waters for fossil fuel production and plan for the phase out of existing leases;**
- **Encourage renewable energy production through leases, incentives and research;**
- **Require cleanup of idle and abandoned wells and contaminated sites;**
- **The U.S. should stop subsidizing fossil fuels and start taxing them;**
- **Set a low carbon fuel standard to discourage carbon-intensive fuels, and prohibit their export as well**
- **We shouldn't be exporting fossil fuels and facilitating GHG abroad;**
- **Conserve more federal lands and waters to restore and expand natural carbon sequestration.**

The California central coast is also a fire zone. In July 2018, freakishly hot winds made worse by climate change knocked a tree branch into a powerline and caused a fire that quickly burned most of the houses on my street. The prior year, we fled the smoke from the Thomas Fire, also started by power lines and high winds. The next year, we were in another mandatory fire evacuation zone.

We are on the California Fair Plan insurance of last resort. Our broker called recently and said they are warning clients to pay on time as there is no grace period for the

insurance of last resort. The cost and difficulty in getting insurance contributes to the housing crisis.

- **We need smarter and safer utility lines. Grid-enhancing technologies (GETs) significantly improve performance of existing transmission lines. Dynamic Line Rating sensors can monitor clearance from vegetation and conditions as part of wildfire prevention. Stronger poles, covered powerlines, and Enhanced Powerline Safety Settings (EPSS) that turn off power if a threat is detected would help prevent these increasingly dangerous and costly fires.**
- **The U.S. should also help particularly vulnerable communities bury powerlines, which reduces the chance it would start a fire by 99%, perhaps with cost sharing with the communities that would benefit. There should be a program that buries powerlines after a fire.**
- **We need policies that increase access to housing and affordable insurance.**

The California central coast is doing its part with many jurisdictions setting strong goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and electrify transportation and buildings, but we can't achieve these goals in isolation. Many people are not aware of technologies like heat pumps and induction stoves that are healthier and more efficient. A federal act was interpreted as not allowing jurisdictions to prohibit gas piping to buildings – even though our municipalities wanted to, voting unanimously in many cases. Lack of electric car charging infrastructure and interconnection issues remain a barrier to adoption. Natural gas is piped to California over vast distances from Texas and New Mexico without adequate accounting for methane leaks and externalities.

- **We need federal policies that make things like heat pumps the default for retrofits and new buildings. Incentives should go to the manufacturers to reduce upfront costs and make clean technology cheaper and polluting furnaces more expensive.**
- **We should have a federal program to go out and retrofit and electrify large numbers of homes cost-effectively.**
- **The Energy Policy & Conservation Act (EPCA) should be updated to its clear that jurisdictions can ban gas piping to buildings if they want to.**
- **The U.S. should take action to reduce bottlenecks that are slowing our transition to clean energy. For instance, a switch gear bottleneck is slowing local installation of EV fast charging infrastructure.**
- **A NASA flyover that exposed methane super-polluters was very helpful. We need regular monitoring of methane to eliminate leaks and factor in climate damage into pricing.**
- **We need to invest in high-speed trains, bike paths and public transportation to reduce the need for driving.**