

Testimony of Alex Epstein, author of *The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels*

The energy industry is the industry that powers every other industry. To the extent energy is affordable, plentiful, and reliable, human beings thrive. To the extent energy is unaffordable, scarce, or unreliable, human beings suffer.

And yet in this election year, the candidates, especially the Republican candidates, have barely discussed energy. Thus, I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss my moral evaluation of this administration's energy policies.

When we evaluate energy policies, such as President Obama's efforts to forcibly restrict fossil fuel use and mandate solar and wind energy,¹ it is always worth asking: Has this been tried before? And what happened when it was?

The answer is: much, much milder versions of the President's energy policy have been tried in Europe—and resulted in skyrocketing energy prices every time.

Take Germany. Over the last decade, Germany pursued the popular ideal of running on unreliable energy from solar and wind. But since unreliable energy can't be relied upon, it has to be propped up by reliable energy--mostly fossil fuels--making the solar panels and wind turbines an unnecessary and enormous cost to the system.² As a result, the average German pays 3-4 times more for electricity than the average American.³ It's so bad that Germans have had to add a new term to the language: "energy poverty."⁴

The United States should learn from the failed German experiment; instead, our President is doubling down on it many times over. And, just as ominously, he is leading global initiatives that call for even the poorest countries to be forced to use unreliaables instead of reliables.⁵ This, in a world where 3 billion people have almost no access to energy and over one billion people have no electricity.⁶

How could this possibly be moral?

¹ [UNFCCC submission of emission reduction targets by the US government](#)

² [Christensen Assoc. - German Experience with Promotion of Renewable Energy](#)

³ [German Association of Energy and Water Industries - BDEW](#)
[DOE Energy Information Administration](#)

⁴ [Der Spiegel](#)
[Handelblatt](#)

⁵ [NRDC](#)

⁶ [International Energy Agency](#)

The alleged justification is that fossil fuels cause climate change and should therefore be eliminated. But this does not follow. As with anything in life, with fossil fuel's impacts we need to look at the big picture, carefully weighing both the benefits and the costs.

And to do that, we need to clearly define what we mean by "climate change." Because while nearly everyone agrees that more CO2 in the atmosphere causes *some* climate change, it makes all the difference in the world whether that change is a mild, manageable warming or a runaway, catastrophic warming.

Which is it? If we look at what has been scientifically demonstrated vs. what has been speculated, the climate impact of CO2 is mild and manageable. In the last 80 years, we have increased the amount of CO2 in the atmosphere from .03% to .04%, and the warming has been barely more than the natural warming that occurred in the 80 years before that, when there were virtually no CO2 emissions. From a geological perspective, both CO2 levels and temperatures are very low; there is no perfect amount of CO2 or average temperature, although higher CO2 levels do create more plant growth and higher temperatures lower mortality rates.⁷

To be sure, many prominent scientists and organizations predict catastrophe--but this is wild speculation and nothing new. Indeed, many of today's thought leaders have been falsely predicting catastrophe for decades. 30 years ago, NASA climate leader James Hansen predicted that temperatures would rise by 2-4 degrees between 2000 and 2010; instead, depending on which temperature data set you consult, they rose only slightly or not at all.

30 years ago, President Obama's top science advisor, John Holdren, predicted that by now we'd be approaching a billion CO2-related deaths from famine. Instead, famine has plummeted as have climate related deaths across the board. According to data from the International Disaster Database, deaths from climate-related causes such as extreme heat, extreme cold, storms, drought, and floods have decreased at a rate of 50%⁸ since the 1980s and 98% since major CO2 emissions began 80 years ago.⁹

How is it possible that we're safer than ever from climate?

Because while fossil fuel use has only a mild warming impact it has an enormous *protecting* impact. Nature doesn't give us a stable, safe climate that we make dangerous. It gives us an ever-changing, dangerous climate that we need to make safe. And the driver behind sturdy

⁷ [Gasparrini et al \(2015\)](#)

⁸ [CRED Em-Dat International Disaster Database](#)

⁹ [Goklany \(2011\)](#)

buildings, affordable heating and air-conditioning, drought relief, and everything else that keeps us safe from climate is cheap, plentiful, reliable energy, overwhelmingly from fossil fuels.

Thus, the President's anti-fossil fuel policies would ruin billions of lives economically *and* environmentally--depriving people of energy and therefore making them more vulnerable to nature's ever-present climate danger.

Policies that cause massive, unnecessary human suffering, including increased climate vulnerability, are immoral.

A moral energy policy is one that liberates all the energy technologies, including fossil fuels, nuclear, and large-scale hydro, and lets them compete to the utmost to provide the most affordable, reliable energy for the most people.

A moral energy policy is an energy freedom policy.