



Problems with Trump's natural gas policies

Sir, Pilita Clark ("Climate science looks to unlikely ally", March 17) is incorrect in arguing that President Donald Trump's pro-natural gas policies may help mitigate climate change.

Ms Clark misses two key problems associated with natural gas policies in the Trump administration. First, methane leakage. Numerous studies (see for example the US Environmental Protection Agency's recent inventory; the Environmental Defense Fund's excellent studies; and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's surprising 2014 study) and meta-analyses have found that most, and perhaps all, of the reduced carbon dioxide emissions associated with increased natural gas

use and production are offset by increased methane emissions.

The Republican leadership in Congress has weakened the Obama administration's efforts to reduce methane emissions. Congress recently invalidated critical EPA regulations that targeted a subset of upstream methane emissions. Congress is currently considering the invalidation of a US Bureau of Land Management regulation that addressed natural gas venting, flaring, and leakages on federal and tribal lands.

Second, the article ignores the harmful path dependencies associated with natural gas reliance. Natural gas may indeed complement renewable energy. For example, natural gas turbines can provide power on short

notice, filling the gaps in electrical capacity that arise when the wind stops blowing or a sunny day turns cloudy.

But natural gas may inhibit the development of next-generation technologies needed to stabilise the climate. For example, natural gas turbines may compete with energy storage providers and "demand response" solutions that would otherwise fill these capacity gaps, weakening incentives to innovate.

Yumehiko Hoshijima

Yale Law School and Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, New Haven, CT, US

