

Mayor Bartlett Believes LNG Exports will Benefit Tulsa

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Mayor Dewey Bartlett is a strong and effective advocate for the energy industry and its continuing positive influence on the economy of the Tulsa region. But, at the end of the day, he is the mayor first and a champion for the energy industry second. That distinction came into focus in recent weeks as the mayor took a familiar leadership role on behalf of the natural gas industry on one issue and in protecting Tulsa citizens in another matter.

In January, Bartlett emerged as leader of a group of big-city mayors who have petitioned the federal government to expedite the permitting of liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals along both the Gulf Coast and West Coast of the U.S. The Tulsa mayor circulated a letter to then-Secretary of Energy Steven Chu urging the U.S. Department of Energy not to delay consideration of several LNG facilities which would enable domestic gas producers to export their product in more significant volumes.

A total of 17 mayors, including those from Houston, Little Rock, Oklahoma City, San Antonio, Ft. Worth, and several other cities in a five-state region, signed the LNG letter.

“A stronger natural gas industry means a stronger economic picture for Tulsa,” Mayor Bartlett said. “The energy sector overall is doing well right now and Tulsa is a huge beneficiary of the jobs growth and the wealth creation from all of various energy sectors, including exploration and production but also utilities, refining, pipelines, energy manufacturing and construction and more.

“Imagine the additional opportunities for growth for Tulsa if and when the current natural gas production glut is gone and natural gas companies return to profitability,” he added. “But this is about much more than just economic benefit for our city and region. It’s about a cleaner environment around the world as countries are able to utilize natural gas. And it’s about becoming even less dependent on OPEC.”

Bartlett took what might be considered a different stance on another sensitive energy-related issue when he wrote to Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt to oppose AEP-PSO’s current settlement agreement with the US Environmental Protection Agency. The mayor’s comments put him on the opposite side of natural gas producers, who had applauded PSO’s decision to switch two of its electric generating plants from coal to natural gas over the next 10 years.

Bartlett cited concerns that the PSO settlement would cause electric rates for all Tulsa customers to increase from 11 to 25% over time. “It’s not my role to adjudicate these complicated regulatory and utility rate issues,” the mayor said. “But it is my role to make sure that our statewide elected officials hear from somebody who has Tulsa’s citizens’ – residential, commercial and industrial ratepayers’ – best interest at heart.

“We don’t know if PSO perhaps has moved to quickly to settle with EPA. We don’t know if PSO has gotten its pencil sharp enough in calculating the rates it seeks from the Corporation Commission. What

we do know is that Tulsa can't compete – new homes, businesses or industries – if our electric rates are non-competitive with those in other parts of Oklahoma and other neighboring states.

“Yes, I am an energy guy through and through. Would natural gas be a logical way to go from an energy guy's point of view? Of course. As mayor, though, I do find myself in the corner in a vigorous argument with myself for the sake of our citizens. Tulsans will always prevail in that one.”