

# John Kerry Walks Back Natural Gas Comments, But Confusion Lingers

John Kerry, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, is the latest Biden administration official to send mixed signals about the current – and future – relevance of domestic oil and natural gas in the global energy market.

Last week, in an interview with Bloomberg Television, Kerry put the domestic natural gas industry "on notice," stating:

"No one should make it easy for the gas interests to be building out 30- or 40-year infrastructure, which we're then stuck with, and you know the fight will be 'well we can't close these because of the employment, because of the investors, et cetera.'" (*emphasis added*)

After facing criticism and confusion, Kerry appeared to scale back his comments. Writing in the Wall Street Journal just days later, Kerry said:

"Natural gas is central to a smart and achievable policy to cut greenhouse-gas emissions today. In the near term, that means pairing with renewables to clean up electricity." (*emphasis added*)

This flip flop leaves observers with more questions than answers.

First, what does Kerry consider "near term"? Kerry's opposition to building natural gas infrastructure that will supply the market 30 years into the future does not square with the U.S. Energy Information Administration's (EIA) own forecasts. EIA's 2022 annual energy outlook projects that petroleum and natural gas will remain the most-consumed sources of energy in the United States through 2050, with natural gas poised to continue growing through 2050.

Second, how will our allies make sense of Kerry's comments? Kerry holds a crucial role for the United States on global climate and energy issues. If the Biden administration truly plans to supply Europe with American LNG for years to come – as announced last month – U.S. officials and stakeholders must remain committed to making the investments needed to fulfil that promise.

Kerry turned to the oil and natural gas industry's actions as evidence that the sector views the future of energy as "an opportunity, not a 'death sentence.'" He pointed out American energy

companies' substantial investments in carbon capture, methane emissions reductions, and emerging power carriers like hydrogen, claiming that "American firms have the technology and experience to deliver solutions."

It's true that the domestic oil and natural gas industry is putting its money where its mouth is when it comes to facilitating the energy transition. The latest Environmental Protection Agency data show a reduction in total U.S. GHG emissions "driven largely by a 10.5 percent decrease" in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the fossil fuels sector, despite increases in domestic energy consumption and production.

But Kerry's praise of the industry rings hollow following the Biden administration's flip-flopping posture on domestic energy production – not to mention following Congressional Democrats' "theatrical" hearings intended to demonize the industry. One can hope if Democrats in Congress do bring oil and natural gas executives in to testify yet another time, Members of Congress will also look at the facts and acknowledge the industry's efforts to manage the transition responsibly.