

The main State Capitol columnist for the Sacramento Bee wrote a piece today on whether California should encourage or discourage additional oil development in the state. This has been a major debate politically, with Governor Brown resisting calls by many environmental groups to ban fracking. Brown has [noted the potential economic benefits](#) from tapping into the possibly huge oil reserves in California that could be unlocked with various advanced oil and gas recovery techniques. The columnist wrapped up [his analysis](#) with this:

Ironically, however, the same liberal legislators who support a fracking moratorium also back another bill making its way through the Senate to impose a 9.5 percent tax on California oil production (and one on natural gas as well) with the proceeds, about \$1.5 billion a year, going to higher education, parks and other purposes.

That bill also is probably doomed, because it would require a two-thirds vote, meaning a couple of Republican senators would have to back it, and that's not going to happen.

However, were the Legislature to pass a levy on extraction and ban fracking, the much-vaunted oil tax – a holy grail goal of liberals for decades – would generate declining amounts of money as oil production declined.

Thus, our conflicts over being so utterly dependent on a commodity we fear, produced by companies we love to hate, translate into nonsensical politics as well.

But this isn't nonsensical politics at all. At least, not if you care about climate change. (And Governor Brown has [said](#) he cares about climate change a lot.) There are reasonable arguments about whether increased natural gas production from fracking in the United States might help us with greenhouse gas emissions (at least in the short-term) – though there are reasonable arguments on the other side too. But natural gas is not the resource that fracking would unlock in California. Here it is [oil](#). Oil produces [substantially more](#) greenhouse gas emissions per unit of energy than natural gas. Oil may produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions than coal, but that wouldn't help us much in California where we get [relatively little](#) of our energy from coal, and in fact might make them worse if it resulted in switching electricity production from natural gas to oil.

So from a climate change perspective, we would want to keep that oil in the ground. If that's

your goal, than a ban on fracking and an oil severance tax are just two different, indeed complementary, ways to accomplish the same goal. And they aren't nonsensical at all.