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WEEKEND EDITION

Author: Response to climate change can be damaging

By Mella McEwen STAFF WRITER
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Michael Macor/San Francisco Chronicle

Author Michael Shellenberger said during the Oilfield Strong webinar that the response to climate change could have an even more damaging environmental impact than climate change itself.

Michael Shellenberger believes climate change is real. But he believes the response to climate change can be even more damaging. “I’m skeptical of electric vehicles due to their environmental impact, which is the same reason I’m skeptical of renewables – solar and wind require 300 to 600 times more land than the equivalent required for a natural gas plant or nuclear plant,” he told Grant Swartzwelder, president of OTA Environmental Solutions, during OTA’s monthly Oilfield Strong webinar.

He added that there could not be enough mining done – and it would be cost-prohibitive – to transition to all electric vehicles.

The public should want a transition from more energy dilute to more energy dense fuels, he continued. “I’m very concerned about using renewables at an industrial level. Whenever we do that, whether it’s for biofuels, like corn ethanol or palm oil, or solar or wind, the environmental impacts are absolutely enormous because we have to cover so much land with these sources,” he said.

Shellenberger, author of “Apocalypse Never: Why Environmental Alarmism Hurts Us All,” agreed climate change is real as illustrated by rising temperatures caused almost entirely from heat-trapping gases. Those are negative benefits, he acknowledged, but “the benefits of a high-energy society are so high, both for humans and the environment, we wouldn’t want to do anything to go to a low-energy society,” which are poor and energy degrading.

“We can expect more heat waves globally, more temperature extremes – all things being equal, we wouldn’t want to see temperature changes at all – but as far as side effects of having to feed and provide energy for 8 billion people, which is a huge number for any species, we do have a big environmental impact but it’s not the end of the world,” Shellenberger said.

The planet has gone through a series of energy transitions since the pre-industrial period when humans moved from wood and dung as their primary energy source to hydroelectric dams and coal and then, as trains and ships became prevalent, from coal to oil, he said. Now, he added, there is a major transition from coal to natural gas.

“I believe, following the studies by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis done in the 1960s and 1970s in Austria, eventually we’ll have a nuclear power civilization,” he predicted. “It’s a superior fuel.”

There is a clear direction of travel from energy dilute to energy dense fuels, Shellenberger said, and “it’s a benevolent transition everyone should want because it’s a transition moving from dirtier sources of energy to cleaner sources of energy, from sources of energy that are matter intensive to ones that are energy intensive, from solids to liquids to gases. Ultimately, I do think it will be a hydrogen economy.”