

Roth: Sustainable energy for all?

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In a recent opinion piece in the New York Times, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described what he sees as two challenges toward living in a world where sustainable energy for all is not just a dream, but a reality.

The first challenge he describes is that while only 1 in 5 people in the world don't have access to electricity, close to 3 billion use harmful dirty fuel sources to not only provide electricity for themselves, but to cook as well. The lights are on, but they darken the health and future for us all. This population of the world is using wood, coal, charcoal, or even animal waste to provide themselves with electricity – exposing themselves to fatal fumes.

The second challenge is the infamous phrase climate change. The reality is that greenhouse gases are directly linked to causing the warming of the Earth's atmosphere. As a direct result, our world is seeing many instances of extreme weather and natural disasters caused by our global consumption of energy. If you were in Oklahoma last year for the two blizzards, historic high July temperatures, painful drought or even the recent earthquakes, you may agree that erratic weather is all around, all seasons.

According to the secretary-general, the pathway forward to confront those challenges is sustainable, cleaner energy.

"Energy transforms lives, businesses and economies," he said. "And it transforms our planet – its climate, natural resources and ecosystems. There can be no development without energy."

Today we have an opportunity to turn on the heat and lights for every household in the world, however poor, even as we turn down the global thermostat. The key is to provide sustainable energy for all.”

No doubt, achieving this vision for the world is difficult, but absolutely obtainable and necessary. I am hopeful that as Oklahomans, Americans, and careful stewards of our planet we can be leaders in this effort. Oklahomans are leaders in the global energy community; we have earned our stripes over the last century. We have brought forth so many innovations, inventions, and solutions to obstacles in the energy industry and can do so now. Whether through cleaner-burning natural gas in the power sector or geothermal technologies to warm and cool our homes, Oklahoman ingenuity has broadened the world’s clean-energy options.

And although many Oklahomans may disagree with much the United Nations attempts to do, on this clean-energy front we ought to be inclined to help with solutions. Working together to achieve a better energy future for the world will also help reduce our country’s reliance on rising foreign oil prices, and create new jobs that are Oklahoman- and American-grown.

It has been said that America is a beacon of light to help lead the world. I believe that is true. I also believe that it is not enough to simply be the light, but better yet provide a cleaner light that truly illuminates a bright future for all the world. Our country has that ability when we set our hearts and minds to it.

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