



Natural Gas: Clean, Affordable, Reliable Energy for Colorado



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Introduction

Like most Americans, Coloradans rely on energy to heat and cool our homes, cook our food, drive our cars (both gas and electric), mow our lawns, and participate in the basic functions of life in a first-world nation. While Colorado utilizes a variety of energy sources, including wind and solar, natural gas continues to be the dominant energy source across the state.

The reasons natural gas remains the primary energy source in Colorado are clear. Natural gas is one of the cleanest energy sources available today, and its reliability and affordability is unmatched. The Environmental Defense Fund conducted an analysis and conceded that “Colorado’s longstanding, consensus-driven effort to reduce methane emissions from the state’s oil and gas sector has been paying off with emissions falling by nearly 70% between 2010 and 2017,” even while the production of oil and gas increased. This environmental milestone has been achieved while roughly 1.9 million Coloradans’ homes (70%) are heated by natural gas. (1)(2)

Despite Coloradans’ reliance on natural gas, the legislature, executive agencies, and Public Utilities Commission have targeted natural gas with a variety of measures and rules that increase the cost, limit the availability, and attempt to eventually block the use of natural gas by consumers by the year 2050.

This report examines why natural gas is essential for a clean environment and for a reliable future for Colorado families and businesses. Objective data and statistics demonstrate that natural gas is essential to maintaining reliable and affordable energy sources for Colorado consumers, and current government actions designed to limit or prohibit the use of natural gas would have a devastating impact on Colorado businesses and residents.



Natural Gas in Colorado

Current data demonstrates how critical natural gas is to heat Colorado homes, “seven out of 10 Colorado homes use natural gas as their primary home heating source. This accounts for roughly 31% of the state’s natural gas use.” This means that 1.9 million people in the state who currently rely on natural gas to make it through the winter. In addition, 157,107 Colorado businesses rely on natural gas to heat their businesses and facilities. (2)(3)(4)

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, “In 2024, Colorado was the eighth-largest natural gas-producing state with 1,854,658 million cubic feet in marketed production” and “has the eighth-largest natural gas reserves in the nation,” as it “is home to all or part of 12 of the nation’s 100 largest natural gas fields” with “10 underground natural gas storage fields with about 141 billion cubic feet of combined storage capacity – roughly 2% of the U.S. total.” (3)

Colorado has the eighth-largest natural gas reserves in the United States.

(3)

Not only has natural gas proven itself to be a reliable and available form of energy in Colorado, but it also offers significant cost savings to consumers. The American Gas Association reports that, in Colorado, “[n]atural gas customers save an average of 52% in Colorado.” (4)



Natural Gas: Ensuring Cleaner Energy for a Cleaner Environment

Natural gas is a clean source of energy, burning cleaner than other fuels and saving people and the environment from heavier amounts of sulfur, mercury, and particulates that may cause health problems. (5)

The natural gas from Colorado’s Piceance Basin is some of the cleanest in the U.S., and the natural gas from the Denver-Julesburg Basin has some of the lowest methane leakage rates in the entire U.S. and has been below the “climate break-even” threshold. Natural gas also releases a limited amount of carbon dioxide – less than coal, diesel fuel, heating oil, gasoline, and propane. (6)


Coal (anthracite)	228.6
Coal (bituminous)	205.7
Diesel fuel and heating oil	161.3
Gasoline (without ethanol)	157.2
Propane	139.0
Natural gas	117.0

Table 1: Pounds of CO₂ emitted per million British thermal units (Btu) of energy for various fuels.

Source: [US Energy Information Administration](#)

(5)

Coloradans for Energy Access reports that including natural gas in the mix of Colorado’s energy sources – alongside wind, solar, and other renewables – produces cleaner energy: “Natural gas is a key part of our energy mix and is



the cleanest burning hydrocarbon. In Colorado, 76% of homes are heated by natural gas, and a new home in Colorado that is powered by natural gas emits 36% less carbon than an all-electric home.” (7)

Atmos Energy confirms this research, adding statistics on the ability of natural gas to contribute to a clean environment:

- “A home with natural gas in Colorado produces approximately 31% fewer carbon dioxide emissions every year than an all-electric home.
- The direct use of natural gas to fuel appliances is 2.5 times more efficient than delivered electricity, and results in a lower carbon footprint than an all-electric home.
- Carbon dioxide emissions would increase. An all-electric home emits approximately 36% more carbon dioxide every year in Colorado.” (8)

Consumer Energy Alliance reports that Colorado’s oil and gas operators have taken action to ensure energy is cleaner than before, benefitting the environment and consumers alike:

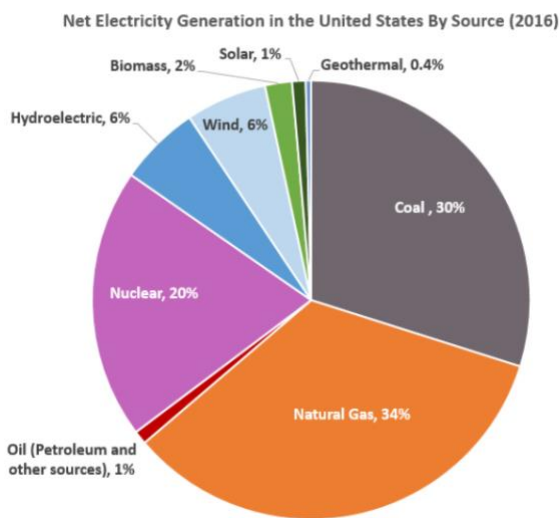
“As natural gas production and consumption have grown in the United States, Colorado’s emissions of pollutants and greenhouse gases have markedly decreased - even as the state’s economy expanded: Colorado’s oil and natural gas industry reduced its emissions by nearly 60% from 2011 to 2020, with even greater reductions expected in the years ahead. After strict air quality regulations in 2014, Colorado operators now capture 95% of emissions from volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and methane - two pollutants critical to addressing emissions-related concerns.” (9)



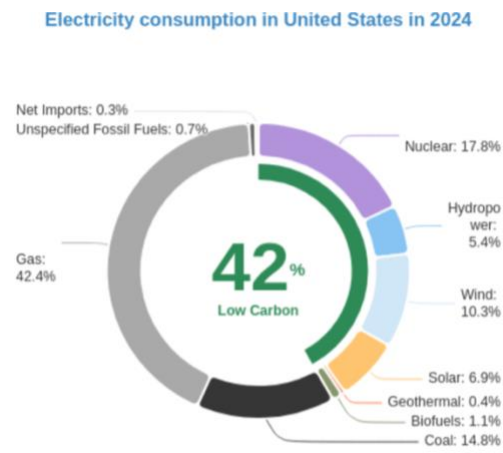


Often, even when a Colorado home or building is powered by electricity, natural gas is the power source behind that electricity generation. In fact, the U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that “The electric power sector accounted for 33% of [Colorado’s] natural gas demand in 2024.” Further, “Natural gas consumption for electricity generation has increased for the past three years.” (3)

The graphs below show how reliance on natural gas has increased across the nation as well. In 2016, 34% of electricity was generated by natural gas, and in 2024, that jumped to 42%.



(10)




https://lowcarbonpower.org/region/United_States

(11)

Natural Gas: Providing Reliability and Affordability for Consumers

The continued use of natural gas can give assurance to citizens who are concerned about the rising cost of living for their basic needs. A recent Ipsos poll showed 73% of Americans are worried about their energy bills. (12)



In its report, *Powering Progress*, the Consumer Energy Alliance writes: “Without natural gas, Colorado households and small businesses would face higher bills, local governments would see reduced revenues, and tens of thousands of jobs, especially in rural and low-income communities across the state would be at risk.” (9)

Politico reports that “[w]ind and solar have generally driven power prices downward **when they are combined with sources such as natural gas**, which can supply power when the wind doesn’t blow and the sun doesn’t shine.” (13)

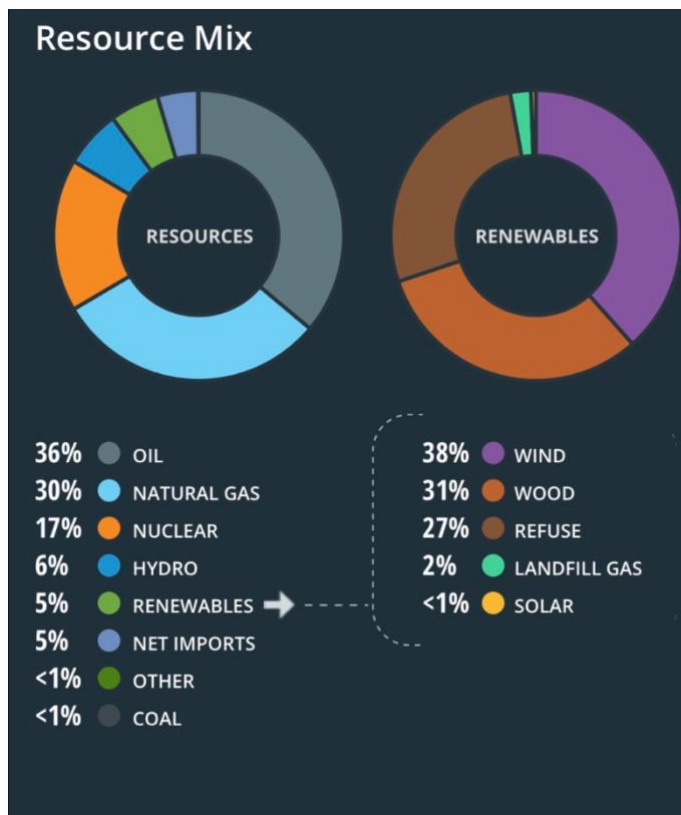
CBS News agrees: “Natural gas is the most affordable source of backup energy, which is necessary to make sure power is available around the clock.” (14)

Reliability

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, natural gas is the backbone for most electric grids in the United States. This is due to its low-cost, reliability, relative environmental cleanliness, fast ramp-up and ramp-down ability, and the fact that it can be easily paired with wind and solar. It is the largest single source of electricity nationwide. No grid in the U.S. runs primarily on solar or wind alone – they all need either gas, nuclear, hydro, or storage. (15)

Xcel Energy explains that “providing reliable safe energy during peak periods means using more natural gas.” Pushing utilities to retire natural gas threatens the power grid’s reliability “by taking round-the-clock power out of rotation and risking blackouts when power demand spikes.” (13)(16)

Natural gas is the most reliable energy source in the United States during storms. This was highlighted during the January 2026 winter storms. The Fiscal Alliance Foundation posted the graph below, based on January 25, 2026, demonstrating how natural gas can be counted on when consumers need energy the most:



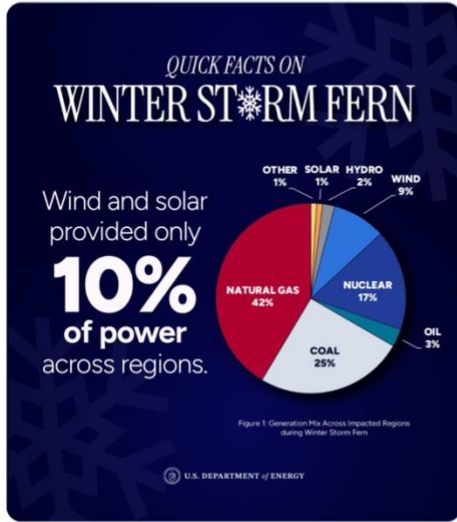
(17)

The conversation about the necessity and reliability of natural gas during severe weather events continued around the nation in late January, with the U.S. Department of Energy crediting natural gas with powering homes across the country:



U.S. Department of Energy
@ENERGY

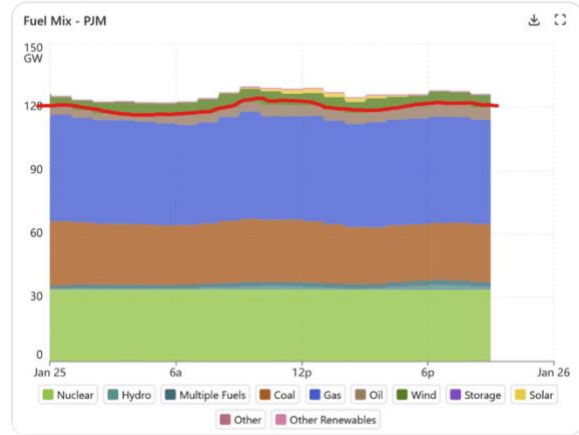
If you want to know the true value of an energy source, pay attention to how it performs when you need it most.



10:06 AM · Jan 31, 2026 · 32.1K Views

John Arnold
@johnarnold

Minimizing emissions is important and should be one of the goals of the energy system. And yet, we have to be honest about where wind+solar+batteries are today on a very cold day in the northeast. Everything below the red line is conventional generation. via @grid_status



8:20 PM · Jan 25, 2026 · 41K Views

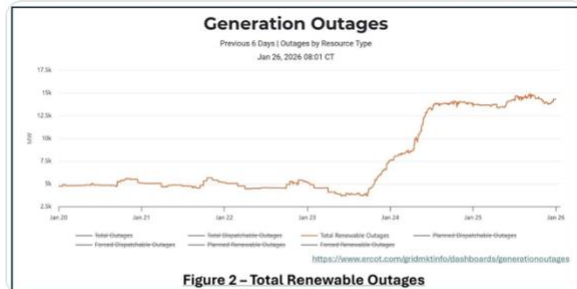
Ryan Maue
@RyanMaue

Report: Texas renewables ghosted the state during extreme weekend cold.

"Wind, solar, and batteries fell from briefly supplying ~63% of generation to ~7% within roughly 48 hours."

Grid is up + demand met by coal/gas/nuclear ✓

kclapp.substack.com/p/the-texas-fr...



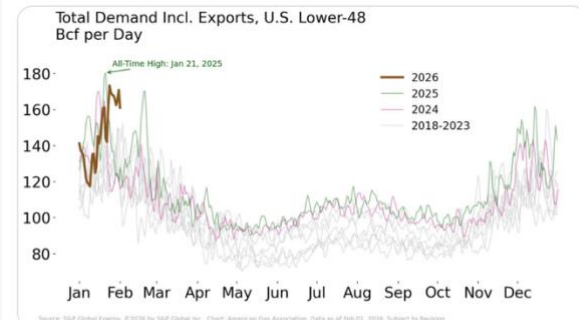
11:29 AM · Jan 26, 2026 · 85.5K Views

Richard Meyer
@RichardMeyerDC

We are in extraordinary territory with the sustained natural gas demand following last weekend's peak.

Natural gas demand this week across the lower-48 reached the highest-ever 7-day average.

Arctic cold persists across the eastern United States. Homes and businesses are relying on natural gas for heating and electricity.

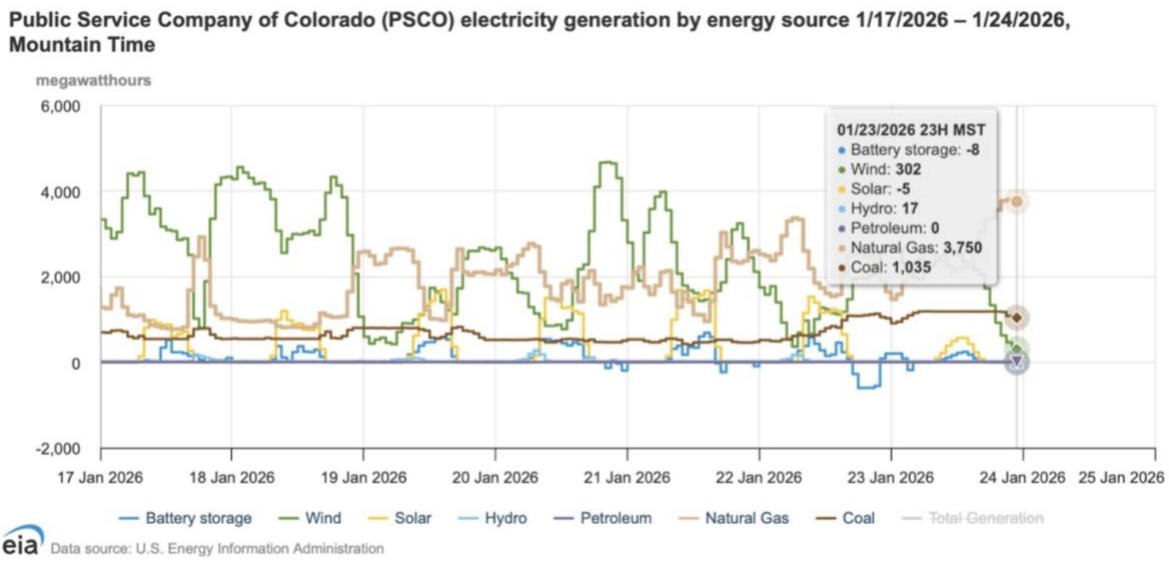


2:48 PM · Feb 1, 2026 · 4,940 Views

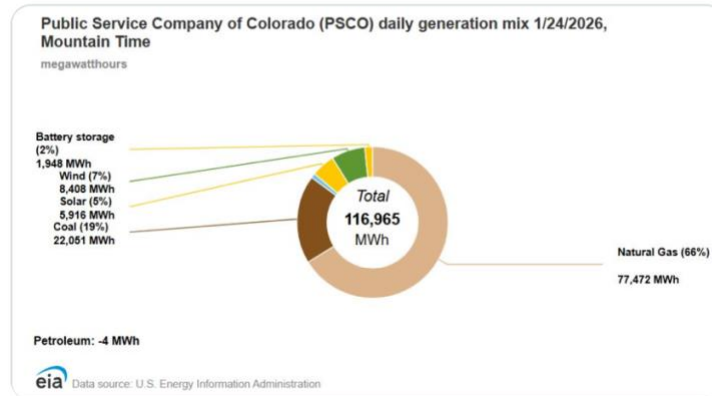
Source: X.com

Just like the rest of the nation, as the graphs in the images below show, Colorado relies heavily on natural gas during pivotal weather events. During storms, solar and wind generation become nearly impossible.

As Amy Oliver Cooke, President of Always On Energy Research, put it, “Wind and solar barely show up.” (18)



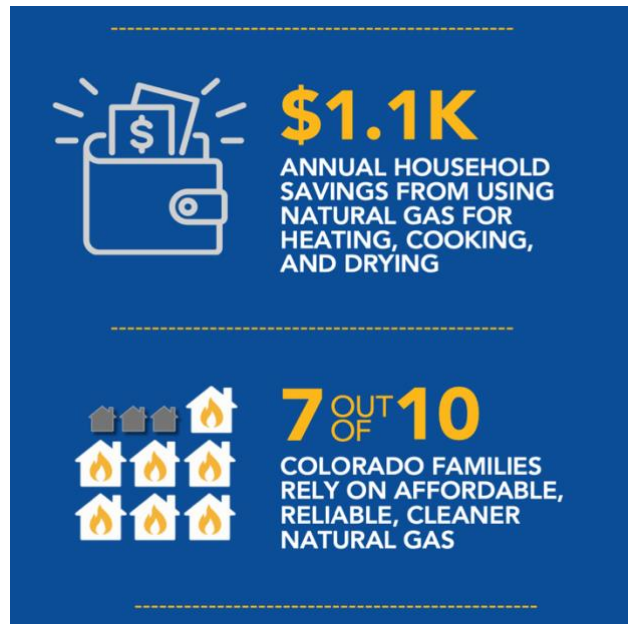
Overall, 85 percent of the electricity generated in Colorado yesterday came from fossil fuels (mainly natural gas). #copolitics



(49)


Affordability

Throughout Colorado, natural gas pushes the price of energy down for consumers. In Colorado towns like Salida, Buena Vista, Gunnison, Steamboat Springs, and Craig, natural gas provides a savings for homeowners of \$1,500 per year on average. In Greeley, Cañon City, Durango, Cortez, and Lamar, natural gas provides average savings for homeowners of \$1,100 per year. (8)(9)



Atmos Energy cites multiple sources to demonstrate the reasons natural gas is one of the most affordable energy options in Colorado:

- Utility bills for an all-electric home (where natural gas is not provided) increases energy costs by approximately \$1,365 annually for the average home in Colorado. (8)
- For every \$1,000 increase in the price of a home, about 1,700 Coloradans cannot qualify to purchase. (19)
- Natural gas is 3.5 times more affordable than electricity. (20)
- Natural gas prices are stable and projected to be 30-50% less than the price of other fuels through 2050. (21)
- Affordable energy bills are crucial for approximately 23% of Colorado households that qualify as income-eligible and need utility bill assistance. One in five Colorado families spend 7% or more of their income on energy bills. (22)

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- A new home in Colorado abiding by 'electric ready' building codes may cost an additional \$11,430 to \$15,100 to construct. (23)


Even when homes switch to electricity for heating, many are still powered by natural gas and benefited by its affordability, as it powers over 30% of Colorado's grid for utilities. Colorado residents and businesses currently pay less for electricity than the national average. Electricity costs 16.12 cents per kilowatt hour for residential use and 12.21 cents for commercial use. Nationally, those numbers are 17.24 and 13.63, respectively. (24)(25)

Research shows that if natural gas availability is limited or removed from Coloradans, our electric bills will rise considerably. "According to Lawrence Berkeley National Labs, each of the top five most expensive states for electricity have mandates requiring 100% of their power to come from renewable or carbon-free sources, making their electricity unnecessarily more expensive." (26)

States with the highest energy prices for homeowners across the U.S. generally penalize, limit, or prohibit the use of natural gas. One reason the price of natural gas in the New England states is so high is because New York Governor Andrew Cuomo blocked a natural gas pipeline in 2016. (27)

Even though these states are located extremely near the Marcellus field (where nearly 20% of the country's natural gas supply can be found), citizens do not reap the benefits of affordable energy.

Real Estate Today's Jim Smith broke down the costs for an average homeowner to transform a 2,000 square-foot home that relies on natural gas into one that relies on electricity only. (Importantly, many "electric-only" homes still rely on natural gas for a considerable portion of the utility's electricity generation, but the cost to consumers skyrockets.) (28)

- 
-
- Air source heat pump for heating and cooling your home, \$22,000
 - Heat pump water heater, \$4,000
 - Insulation and air sealing work to improve efficiency, \$5,000
 - Ventilation system for indoor air quality, \$4,000
 - 10kW solar system PV, \$30,000
 - Electric panel upgrade, if needed, \$4,000
 - Electric vehicle charger, \$1,500

Altogether, this is a cost of over \$70,000 – not a price most Coloradans can afford. These price increases will be forced on Colorado consumers if the Public Utility Commission’s new rules (described later) stand.

Instead of saving costs through natural gas, consumers in states that limit or ban natural gas are often forced to pay for the redundancies required by renewable energy sources, most often wind and solar.

In *We Didn’t Just Get Expensive Electricity. We Built a System That Makes It Inevitable*, William Murray writes, “Wind and solar generation increased fourfold between 2011 and 2020, reaching record output by 2024. These sources have advantages. But they also have a basic limitation: they don’t produce power all the time. So, utilities must build backup systems. Extra transmission lines. Extra capacity. None of this redundancy is free. Every mile of wire, every idle backup turbine, every overpriced and underutilized battery storage unit will eventually, without fail, appear on a customer’s bill.” (29)



A Review of Anti-Energy Choice Legislation in Colorado

Over the past several years, Colorado has shifted aggressively toward decarbonization and electrification, creating a regulatory landscape that has become increasingly challenging for the oil and gas industry to operate in. The state has enacted a series of bills that have fundamentally altered how oil and gas operations can function.


SB19-181: Shifted the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission’s (COGCC) mission from promoting oil and gas development to prioritizing public health, safety, and the environment. It also gave local governments authority to restrict or deny projects, control well siting, and impose additional fees and regulations, while adding new layers to the permitting process through local approval, expanded analysis, and public review. (30)

HB19-1261: The first bill that set statewide greenhouse gas reduction targets, requiring Colorado to reduce emissions 26% by 2025, 50% by 2030, and 90% by 2050 (relative to 2005 levels). Additionally, this bill set the foundation for a large number of the later restrictions to come, policies such as methane rules, Clean Heat Plans, and electrification efforts. (31)

HB21-1266: Mandated specific emissions cuts for the oil & gas industry: 36% reduction by 2025 and a 60% reduction by 2030. It also forced utilities toward an 80% emissions cut by 2030. (32)

SB21-264: Required utility companies distributing natural gas to file “Clean Heat Plans” with the Public Utilities Commission and gave more authority to the PUC to initiate rules related to these plans. It also required a 4% emissions reduction by 2025 and a 22% reduction by 2030. (33)

SB24-159: Though this bill ultimately failed to pass, it was arguably the most aggressive anti-natural gas proposal introduced in Colorado. It would have ended new oil & gas permits by 2030, effectively phasing out the industry as a whole from the state. (34)



Together, these measures have increased regulatory costs, added layers upon layers of oversight, and created long-term uncertainty, marking a significant departure from Colorado’s historical approach to supporting the oil and gas industry, which accounts for over 300,000 Colorado jobs. (50)

303,000

JOBS

In 2021, oil & gas supported more than 303,000 jobs which equals **7.7% of Colorado's total employment.**

Although some legislation has been proposed to protect the production of oil and gas, the majority party has consistently blocked these efforts. These bills include:

HB21-1034 and **HB23-1127**: Would have invalidated any rule, law, or ordinance that limits or prohibits the use of natural gas or propane-powered appliances in homes and businesses, preserving energy choice for the consumer. (35)
(36)

HB26-1129: Would have excluded residential carbon dioxide emissions (from things such as home heating and cooking) from a gas utility’s clean heat plan calculations (as required by SB21-264), meaning those emissions would not count against the company’s reduction goals. It also would have repealed a prohibition that had stopped gas utilities from giving incentives to customers to hook up to gas service. (37)

Unfortunately, the legislature’s burdensome climate rules show no signs of softening, and as a result, the regulatory red tape placed on the oil & gas industry and the cost of heating a family home with natural gas are set to keep increasing.



The Public Utility Commission's Vigorous Action on Natural Gas

The Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) is a government agency under the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies that is responsible for regulating private and investor-owned utilities and facilities, including electric, natural gas, telecommunications, and some transportation services.

It was first established by the Public Utilities Act of 1913, mainly to replace the Railroad Commission and set rates for the state's railroad carriers, but the Act also granted the Commission authority over all utilities. The General Assembly later expanded its jurisdiction over trucks, automobiles, and fixed public utilities as those systems grew and expanded throughout the 1900s. In 1954, the PUC's authority was embedded in the Colorado constitution. The PUC has just three commissioners, all of whom are appointed by the governor to serve four-year terms, though they are supported by a staff of 122 full time employees. (38)(39)

Currently, two of the three PUC commissioners have backgrounds centered on decarbonization and reduced natural gas use. This clear bias has had a major influence on recent PUC actions restricting the use of natural gas in Colorado.

PUC Chairman Eric Blank, when asked about his reasoning for re-enlisting for a second term on the Commission, stated, "For me, Colorado is potentially uniquely situated to build a replicable national model about how to decarbonize our energy systems in an affordable and reliable manner and that's an exciting opportunity for me." (51)

Commissioner Tom Plant, also a former Colorado representative, had sponsored a number of bills during his time in the legislature to push Colorado toward using more renewable energy sources. One of his bills, HB02-1202, would have required the PUC to ensure electric companies get a certain amount of their power from renewable sources. It would have begun




at 5% in 2003, increased by 1% each year through 2011, and then set a minimum of 12% renewable energy from 2012 onward. Rulemaking authority on this subject would have been granted to the PUC. Plant also was a part of the Union of Concerned Scientists in its Climate Change Department to examine “transportation and energy solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.” (52)(53)

Since the legislature placed new obligations upon the PUC such as expanding electrification, clean heat objectives, and emissions reduction, its reach has been broadly expanded. The PUC is now tasked with ensuring that Coloradans receive “safe, reliable, and reasonably-priced services consistent with the economic, environmental and social values of our state.”

The Commission is in charge of setting utility rates, so utilities may not raise prices without PUC approval. Utilities such as Xcel and Black Hills file rate cases to increase prices, typically so they can recover costs for infrastructure updates, safety improvements, or system reliability. The PUC must approve, modify, or deny those requests. (39)

While the PUC regulates utilities in line with the state’s ever-evolving policy priorities, the cost of heating residential homes has risen substantially in recent years. With the growing regulatory burdens, as discussed in the legislative section, utilities have been forced to raise rates to keep in line with the state’s demands. This increase comes as Colorado continues pursuing aggressive greenhouse gas reduction targets – an effort overseen by the PUC.

In July 2017, Governor John Hickenlooper signed an executive order committing Colorado to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26% by 2025. By the end of that year, the average residential natural gas price had increased from \$7.35 to \$8.08 per thousand cubic feet. (40)(41)



Over the next several years, prices declined. The average residential price was \$7.74 in 2018, \$7.77 in 2019, and \$7.22 in 2020, consistently falling below \$8 per thousand cubic feet during that period.

In January 2021, the state released the Colorado Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Roadmap, passed by the legislature through HB19-1261, outlining targets to reduce emissions by 26% by 2025, 50% by 2030, and 90% by 2050. (41)(42)

By the end of 2021, the average residential natural gas price had risen to \$9.11 per thousand cubic feet, representing a 26.17% increase from 2020 levels. As of February 27, 2026, the latest average residential price sits at \$11.17. (41)

Though the original intention of the PUC was to regulate monopolies and ensure affordability for available utilities, its decisions have been directed toward cracking down on utility companies who supply natural gas for homes. On December 1, 2025, the PUC finalized a statewide “Clean Heat” decision that would require utility companies, such as Xcel Energy – the primary provider of electricity and natural gas in the state – to cut carbon emissions from their systems by 41% by 2035.

This target forces utilities and consumers to move at a much quicker pace than originally intended, as the General Assembly had set a benchmark in Senate Bill 21-264 of reducing emissions by 22% by 2030, relative to 2015 levels. (43)

The PUC’s decision went much further than what is currently codified in statute: the Commission ruled that utility companies must account for a 100% greenhouse gas reduction by 2050, which will amount to a total elimination of natural gas over the next 25 years. (44)

In practical terms, this means that hundreds of thousands of homeowners and landlords across Colorado are expected to transition from gas-based heating to electric heat pumps, along with switching to cooking appliances



powered by electricity generated from solar and wind sources within that period. (45)(46)

In order to meet the original goal of a 22% reduction, Xcel Energy, in its 2024-2028 Clean Heat Plan, projected over \$1 billion in cost increases over the course of the 5-year plan. The plan also notes that the cost of electrification borne by consumers – expenses not accounted for by the General Assembly – could total “additional billions of dollars, even after rebates.” (47)

Black Hills Energy, another leading utility company in Colorado, had reported the original Clean Heat Plan would cost Black Hills \$397 million per year, exceeding the price cap by 67 times. (48)

So, while the PUC has deemed this new and accelerated plan as “cost-effective,” there are still major costs not accounted for by the Commission that fall not just on the utilities, but – most importantly – on the consumer.


Conclusion


In light of Colorado’s longstanding reliance on natural gas, its proven reliability, and environmental compatibility, policies aimed at phasing out its use risks creating more harm than benefit for everyday Coloradans. The oil and gas industry accounts for nearly 7.7% of Colorado’s total employment and 70% of Colorado’s homes are heated by natural gas. Moving too aggressively away from natural gas would result in substantial increases in energy costs for Colorado consumers, strain energy reliability, and place an unnecessary burden on families and workers across the state. A more balanced approach – one that recognizes the critical role natural gas continues to play in both economic stability and environmental improvement – is essential to ensuring Colorado’s energy future is both sustainable and secure.



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