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Are You Voting for the Terminator's Terminals? by Kelpie Wilson

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If you are a California voter, you might have heard about the big celebrity protests in Malibu a few weeks ago. Led by actor Pierce Brosnan, everyone from Barbra Streisand to Sting showed up to protest a planned LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) terminal that BHP Billiton wants to build 14 miles off the coast at Oxnard.

BHP Billiton, a giant Australian mining company, is one of four companies hoping to build LNG terminals off the southern California coast to receive liquefied natural gas shipped from sources in Russia, Australia, Indonesia and South America. The sprawling off-shore industrial facilities will unload the chilled gas from tankers, warm it back to a gaseous state, and then pipe it into California's gas grid.

There are many reasons for neighbors to be upset about this kind of industrial development off their coast. Safety is a big issue. The BHP Billiton facility is a new, untested design. An accident could produce a fireball miles in diameter that would incinerate everything in its way. Discharges would impact marine life, and the terminal would emit 200 tons of pollutants and up to 25 million tons of greenhouse gases every year. It would become the largest polluter in Ventura County.

But this is much more than a "not in my back yard" concern. LNG terminals are the receptacles that will plug California into a whole new energy regime.

The LNG energy regime is at odds with California's direction as a renewable, clean energy leader. This is a direction that Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger says he is committed to, but his actions say otherwise.

In September, after fighting against it for months, Schwarzenegger signed California's global warming bill, AB 32. He also signed into law a companion bill, SB 1368, that requires all new power generation to meet greenhouse gas emission standards. The purpose of SB 1368 was to stop power companies from circumventing AB 32 by building new dirty coal plants out of state to supply California with electricity. The bottom line for the new standards is that they cannot emit more greenhouse gases than a regular natural gas power plant. The problem is, LNG is not regular natural gas.

We tend to think of natural gas as a clean energy source, and relative to coal, it is. But it is only clean when it is burned. Unburned natural gas is somewhere around 18 times more potent than carbon dioxide as a global warming gas. In the process of extracting, piping, compressing and shipping the gas across the ocean, a lot of it is going to leak, unburned, into the atmosphere. Considerable energy also gets used in the processing of the gas, again translating into more greenhouse emissions. A power plant fueled by LNG may heat the planet as much as a coal plant.

At around a billion dollars apiece, LNG terminals would also end up costing ratepayers. This is money that would not be available to spend on renewable energy and better efficiency. California needs to invest in its renewable energy infrastructure, not create a whole new infrastructure for imported fossil fuels. They can call it a clean needle, but it's still a needle delivering the fossil fuel fix.

So how can the BHP Billiton LNG terminal be going forward in a state that has put such careful

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consideration into its plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? The answer lies with the Governor.

On the campaign trail, Schwarzenegger said he is undecided about the BHP Billiton terminal, but he has been a big supporter of LNG in the past, and he has lots of connections with the industry.

BHP Billiton has paid more than \$2.3 million in the last two years to one lobbying firm that is connected to Schwarzenegger's re-election committee. A consortium of energy companies, including BHP Billiton, Chevron Texaco, and Sempra Energy, hired another lobbying firm called Navigators to sell the LNG concept to the public. Navigators bills itself as "an elite team of lobbyists, political strategists and public relations experts that offers integrated campaigns to solve difficult public policy problems." The top political client listed on the Navigators Web site is Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Then there are the direct contributions to Schwarzenegger's campaign committees. According to [ArnoldWatch.org](#), Chevron-Texaco has given \$516,800 (Arnold's chief of staff Patricia Clarey is a former Chevron lobbyist) and oil tycoon T. Boone Pickens has given \$919,900. Pickens is a big LNG booster.

Of course Arnold might say that the "big money special interests" won't sway him, but the fact is that he holds an inordinate amount of power in this situation. Federal law gives the governor veto power over these off-shore terminals. There is no doubt that the energy companies have his ear. But the people of the state, whom he is supposed to serve, have had little say in the matter.

There has been no comprehensive analysis of the impact of imported LNG by the agency that is supposed to look after the public interest - the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). Instead, the CPUC has been quietly making rules to facilitate LNG imports, without determining either the need or the impacts.

Public interest advocates from RACE (Ratepayers for Affordable Clean Energy) say that the CPUC should have done an environmental analysis and held evidentiary hearings before allowing LNG into California, and they are suing CPUC to force such a process. Attorney General Bill Lockyer and the South Coast Air Quality Management District have weighed in on the lawsuit and are also asking CPUC to reconsider its decision to allow LNG into the state.

But the permits for the BHP Billiton terminal could be approved within weeks or months. Once the permits are approved, if the governor does nothing, the project will go forward. Only the governor's veto can stop it. Democratic candidate Phil Angelides says that if he is elected governor he will veto the BHP Billiton LNG terminal.

California voters should know that a vote for Schwarzenegger may also be a vote to plug California into an LNG future.

~~~~~ Editorial Notes ~~~~~

*Kelpie Wilson is the [Truthout](#) environment editor. A veteran forest protection activist and mechanical engineer, she is the author of *Primal Tears*, an eco-thriller novel published by North Atlantic Books.*

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