



The Importance of Fracking on Earth Day

Lower gas prices probably helped President Obama get re-elected too.

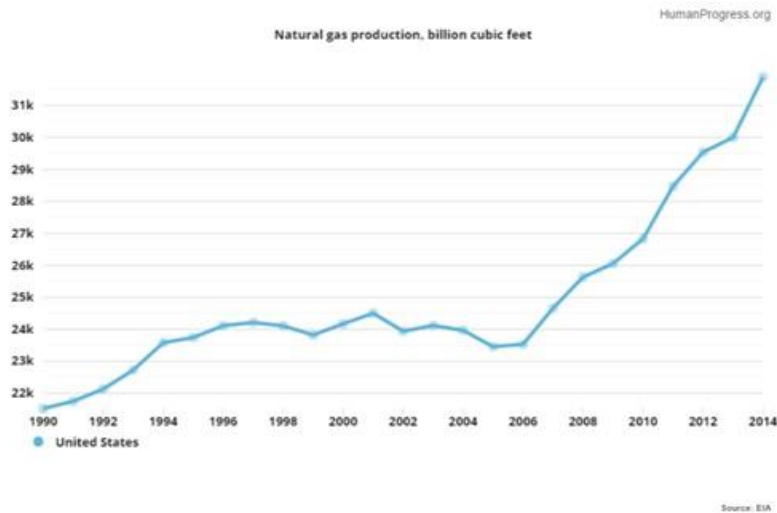
Marian Tupy

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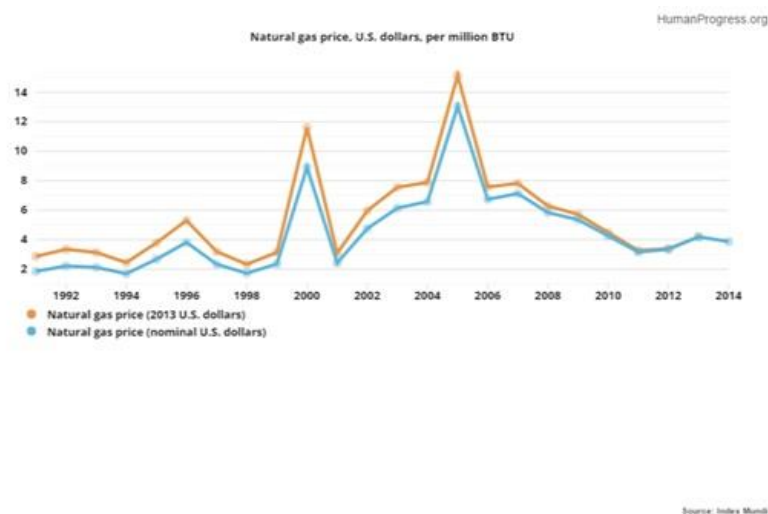
Earth Day 2016 came and went without much fanfare. Instead of the usual doom and gloom about the state of the planet, the headlines on April 22 were dominated by our entertainingly dysfunctional presidential primaries and by Barack Obama's clumsy attempt to rig the British referendum in favor of the U.K. remaining in the terrifyingly dysfunctional European Union. You see, for President Obama there is no problem too small to opine about. Conversely, most problems appear too large for him to fix—just ask those war veterans on the hospital waiting lists, which our Commander in Chief promised to do something about back in 2007.

I thought of our president on Earth Day not only because of his hypocritical and misguided intervention in the electoral process of another sovereign democracy, but because of another promise he made when running for his first term in the White House. I hope some of you still remember those 5 million "green jobs" Obama promised to create in order to "stimulate job growth" and America's transition to green energy. Obama's failure to deliver but a small fraction of those jobs must surely rank—along with the botched launch of Obamacare—as one of his bigger domestic failures.

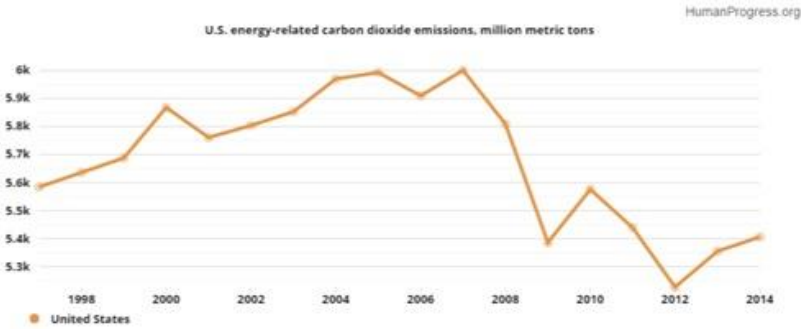
Yet, the man was re-elected in 2012 and will remain with us until January 2017. Admittedly, the Republicans did have an uninspiring candidate, but Obama, unknowingly, had a trump card in his pocket: the fossil fuel industry. The fracking revolution, which the progressives continue to do everything possible to stop, has massively increased the U.S. production of natural gas.



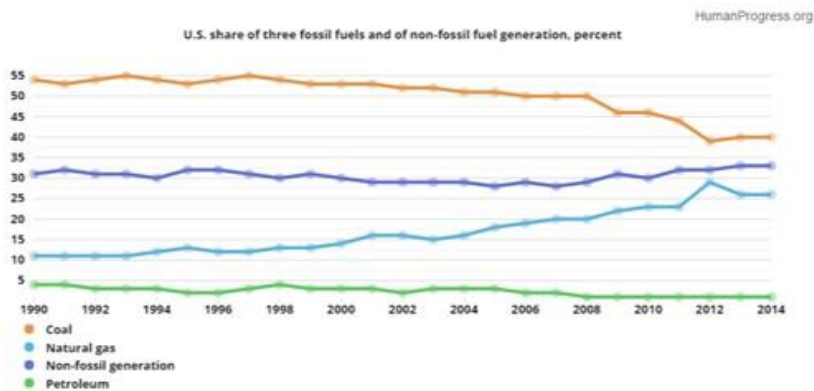
The price of gas collapsed from its high in 2005 and made energy much more affordable for ordinary Americans. A welcome respite from the lingering effects of the Great Recession may have contributed to Obama's relatively close reelection.



There were other, non-pecuniary, benefits of the fracking revolution. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, U.S. CO₂ emissions declined from 5,584 million metric tons in 1997, when the Kyoto protocol was signed, to 5,408 million metric tons in 2014 (last year for which Human Progress has data). That's a reduction of 3 percent. Over the same period of time, the U.S. economy grew from \$11.9 trillion in 1997 to \$17.4 trillion (adjusted for inflation). That's a growth of 46 percent.



Our reliance on coal—the cleanest type of coal produces 215 pounds of CO₂ per million Btu of energy, while natural gas produces 117 pounds of CO₂ per million Btu of energy—was reduced from 55 percent of energy production in 1997 to 40 percent in 2014. Correspondingly, natural gas use rose from 12 percent to 26 percent over the same time period.



Had the self-declared smartest guy in the room read F.A. Hayek, he would have known that politicians and central planners cannot know where the jobs of the future come from. Capitalism may not be to Barack Obama's taste, but it may have saved his bacon.

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