

## Could Renewable Energy Really Breeze Past Natural Gas?\*

Natural gas is getting mixed reviews when it comes to the cause of fighting global warming. One side is saying that it is cutting into coal's marketshare and thereby drastically reducing heat trapping emissions while the other is noting that it is boxing out more promising options, such as wind and solar energy.

The changing energy dynamics have meant CO2 emissions are the lowest they have been since the early 1990s. And so the key question then becomes whether policymakers should continue to tap the natural gas market or look forward to cleaner, renewable options to do the heavy lifting. Both types of fuel, in fact, are central to global commerce.

"This idea of natural gas as a transition fuel to renewables is strange, Total SA Chief Executive Patrick Pouyanne said last week at the World Gas Conference in Washington, as reported by Reuters. "Natural gas is a solution" to climate change. Executives from ConocoPhillips, BP Plc, Equinor Asa and Qatar Petroleum agreed with those sentiments.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration is reporting that the nation's proven natural gas reserves increased by 5% to 341 trillion cubic feet, or nearly 17 trillion cubic feet more than the previous survey. Natural gas consumption is on the rise, increasing by as much as 30% a year, according to government projections — an amount that will at least be sustained because of the expected demand from Asia.

Natural gas' share of the power generation market could hit 50% percent in the coming years while that of coal will stagnate at 30%. Industrial growth, meanwhile, will account for 60% of that expansion.

Economic forces will propel the natural gas industry forward — something that is creating jobs and wealth while also helping to reduce heat-trapping emissions. But those advances do not preclude the development of newer and cleaner technologies to support renewables, which are also gaining favor in policy circles. For the foreseeable future, the fuels will co-exist while also expanding their reach.