

Anna Williams

1/23/2017

Jennifer Weeks' 2012 article, "U.S. Oil Dependence," examines the role of oil in America is a guarantee of economic health, a good subject to volatile global prices, and one with controversial environmental impacts.

Politicians, oil executives, and economists, explains Weeks, debate whether or not boosting North America oil production will reduce oil prices in the US. According to oil executives in Canada, American producers buy their oil at "a significant price discount" compared to buying oil from other countries (565). Many economists disagree, however, that drilling more on American soil or drawing crude oil from Canada's tar sands will make a difference on oil prices. Because America consumes 20 percent of the world's oil but holds only 2 percent of oil reserves, the US is still subject to internationally-set prices (553). Some economists contend that even if domestic oil companies produced more, "they would still sell to the highest global bidder" (554).

Weeks claims that America is Canada's best bet for exporting bitumen, a thick, black form of oil, for processing and therefore the US can essentially force Canada to "clean up" their messy and environmentally dangerous extraction practices. Separating oil from sand consumes massive amounts of water, and creates a lot of toxic waste (556), and tar sand oil emits at least 20 percent more air pollution in its lifetime than conventional oil (556-557). Some oil executives argue that if America does not consume Canada's bitumen then other countries will. But no other viable consumers have the technology needed to process oil. Therefore, as Canada's main consumer, America has the upper hand in maintaining safer handling of bitumen.

Oil executives argue that requiring more "boutique fuels" (oil mixed with renewable fuels) unnecessarily burden oil companies and consumers, but arguably boutique fuels drive demand for cars that can consume more renewables, making renewables more competitive with oil in the long run. Some health experts believe regulations would reduce nitrogen oxide emissions equivalent to removing 33 million cars from the road by 2017, while increasing the price per gallon of gasoline by 1 cent (564). As more engines need to be able to consume hybrid gasoline, Weeks explains, producing more of these engines could in turn drive up demand for renewable fuel, thus helping the economy long-term.