

Scott Coenen: Energy in a Polar Vortex

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Another year, another polar vortex here in Wisconsin. We're accustomed to extreme cold snaps here in our state, but this year the cold has extended south to regions that don't often share our temperatures. Not surprisingly, this has created significant energy issues in places like Texas. Over the last two days, Texas has undergone power outages and rolling blackouts as its energy grid has been unable to cope with a huge spike in demand coupled with faltering generation.

Conservatives often focus critically on renewable energy when extreme weather strains energy systems. The numbers, however, are far more complicated than many like to admit. Monday in Texas roughly 30 gigawatts (GW) of power went offline due to extreme cold. Of that 30 GW, 26 GW were thermal generation (coal, natural gas, nuclear), while 4 GW were wind. So, while many have probably heard much about frozen wind turbines, you may not have heard that roughly 85% of the outages in Texas were actually due to traditional fuel plants. In fact, an entire nuclear reactor was brought offline Monday due to adverse effects from the cold. That's not to say traditional energy sources like natural gas aren't a good resource, they are, but extreme weather events are hard on all energy generation and infrastructure. And unfortunately, it seems as if extreme weather is becoming more common.

Conservatives should take a pragmatic approach to these energy issues. As a nation, we are not ready to rely exclusively on renewable energy, especially when we have to build infrastructure to meet once-in-a-century weather events multiple times per year. Pushing back on the Green New Deal and far-left environmentalism that sets impractical goals for very practical technologies is all well and good but conservatives should resist the urge to blame emerging technologies for every problem our energy infrastructure confronts, especially when the facts don't back that up. In the coming weeks we'll learn more about what's happening in Texas and conservatives should prioritize developing responsible solutions, offering paths

forward instead of falling back on outdated rhetoric.

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