

Geologist: Access to energy key to ending global poverty

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OKLAHOMA CITY Access to all forms of energy, including fossil fuels, is key to ending global poverty, Scott Tinker, a geologist known for his narration of an acclaimed documentary about global energy production, said Monday at Oklahoma City University.

Tinker, the director of the **Bureau of Economic Geology** at the University of Texas at Austin and the state geologist of Texas, discussed the effects of "energy poverty," or lack of access to energy, that occurs in many developing countries.

He said 1 billion people in the world do not have access to electricity, while 2.7 billion are cooking without clean solutions.

"One-third of the world living in energy poverty is not sustainable," Tinker said. "There's a correlative relationship. The paradox of all this is energy won't end poverty, but you can't end poverty without energy. So it's the beginning, but it still has to happen in order for it to end."

Tinker compares electricity and gas usage between countries, including Kenya, which ranks lower due to energy poverty, Tinker said.

Access to energy is necessary to grow the economy, improve birthrates and education, and reduce hunger, among other things, he said.

"These things are linked; you can't separate energy, the economy and the environment," Tinker said.

Tinker said discussions and nonpartisan education about energy sources and data are important to reducing energy poverty and decreasing environmental impacts of nonrenewable forms of energy.

He discussed Switch Energy Alliance, a nonprofit he formed that creates short videos, movies and more to promote education about energy and challenges associated with it.

"The transition to massively reduce energy poverty is doable in a few decades," Tinker said.

He said discussions about energy often focus on downsides, ignoring the positive aspects.

"There is one atmosphere," Tinker said. "Zero emissions is political, it's not real, unless you don't use power or fuel or clothing or cellphones or homes or cars."

Tinker argued that while the cost per unit of renewable energy has gone down, it is not less than other forms. Also, when panels and turbines are no longer usable, they need to be disposed of, shifting the environmental impact.

"When you have energy that is affordable and reliable, you're going to use it," he said. "We've got to figure out how to clean it up."

Tinker said the environmental impact of oil and natural gas is significant, but is getting better, adding that they are necessary forms of energy.

"You'll hear climate change is the most important issue of the time, and fossil fuels are the problem. It's true," Tinker said. "You'll hear poverty is the biggest issue and fossil fuels are the solution. It's true.

"You can't get out of poverty without large-scale energy. Coal, natural gas, nuclear, petroleum."

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