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Energy exec decries bad science from oil-and-gas opponents

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May 04--Naysayers, according to Todd Staples, want the world to do without fossil fuels.

And they want to use bad science to make their argument, he told guests at the East Texas Energy Symposium Tuesday.

"From our keyboards to our tables, from our mobile phones to our makeup, oil and natural gas is an important part of our daily lives," said Staples, who followed his two-term stint as Texas Commissioner of Agriculture with his current post as president of the Texas Oil & Gas Association. "I think we need to use climate science, not climate fear, to base economic policy decisions.

"Most information is circulated by people that are paid to say it -- there's an enormous amount of money funding people and studies to discredit oil and natural gas."

Tuesday's event was the seventh annual gathering of oil-and-gas representatives and supporters, centered on the East Texas Oil Museum at Kilgore College.

"The East Texas Oil Museum is one of the few venues the oil-and-gas industry has to present the value of what our industry brings," said symposium chairman Mark Goloby. This year's gathering focused on optimizing production in a low-cost world: "We want to give you some ideas, some thoughts and some help so you can make more with what you've got."

Following a tour of the oil museum, the industry reps filled the Devall Student Center Ballroom for a series of presentations featuring Daryl Mazzanti, president of Gas Assisted Rod Pump; Dr. Jorge Viamontes, senior vice president of reservoir resources for NuTech Energy; and geologist Robert Baumgardner of the **Bureau of Economic Geology**.

About 125 people attended this year's event, according to East Texas Oil Museum Executive Director Merlyn Holmes.

Following a welcome by Kilgore College President Brenda Kays, Staples underscored the "unprecedented quality of life" Texans and Americans enjoy because of a reliable energy supply.

"Oil and natural gas is the industry that's building schools, funding universities and paving our roads," he said, and the United States has become the world's largest producer of oil and natural gas: "Texas was and is the epicenter of this renaissance."

Horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing have realigned the political landscape with a strengthened United States, Staples continued. This despite various, ongoing declines in rig counts.

Those slumps have had a real impact on families, he added, with 75,000 jobs lost since the peak employment period of December 2014 amid wider consequences throughout the state and nation.

"Fortunately, other sectors of the economy have been able to benefit from low-cost natural gas," Staples said. Looking forward, "We know that prices will continue to be volatile. We know that there is some stability ahead in 2017.

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"Even with the difficulties that we face today, Texas remains an oil-and-gas state," with two million direct and indirect jobs tied to the industry as the nation's number one producer, possessing the nation's largest pipeline system.

It didn't happen by accident, Staples said, but because of the industry's ongoing, painstaking efforts.

"It's this type of approach that has to continue to happen if we want to have a sound economy, good health environment and growth for our children and families."

Staples emphasized oil as the backbone of the Texas economy -- "When you create an oil and natural gas job, you're creating a lot of jobs in other industries." -- and scoffed at criticism.

"Regardless of what you hear from the likes of Bernie Sanders, oil and natural gas development is highly-engineered, it's highly-regulated and it's safe," Staples, he added, the selective studies of opponents.

Air quality is improving, Staples continued, and not because of renewable energy resources -- they haven't been around long enough and broadly enough to make that impact.

"There's certainly not enough power on the grid today to make a difference," he said. "The Texas Oil & Gas Association is not opposed to renewable energy. We just don't think government should be in the business of picking winners and losers."

Consumers need to be savvy about the information they're getting, Staples finished.

"That's all we're asking for, is to have a science based approach to making decisions and to coming up with the right solutions. Our water is safe," he said. "Our air quality is safe and it's improving" despite skyrocketing production.

At the same time, "Fracking makes us less dependent on foreign countries for our sources of energy."

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