

Q: How will the storms in February impact the move toward renewable energy?

Brian Lockhart: I think a single storm, as devastating as it was in places like Texas where people are not equipped to deal with bursting pipes and snow, is unlikely to change opinions. Those who believe fossil fuels are the bane of our existence and support radical ideas like the Green New Deal have made that a political ideology and they will not be swayed by a storm, regardless of how many people are impacted. Saving the planet from destruction in the next 10 years is far more noble a cause than creating jobs or economic opportunity for the masses. What I have never understood about climate alarmists is how they reconcile the fact that the US is cutting greenhouse emissions while the rest of the world is increasing the same. According to EPA data, from 2005 to 2018 the US reduced emissions on power generation by 27% even as GDP grew 25%. The rest of the world, in contrast, increased emissions over the same period by more than 30%.

I am in no way opposed to renewable energy. We have replaced most lights in our homes to LED because it makes sense to do so. Technological advancements will continue to make renewable energy more sensible for the masses without forcing draconian changes to the economy. We all benefit if free markets determine the pace of change, rather than government mandates.

Clint Pekrul, CFA: If there is one thing that we have learned over the past year or so, it is that the nation's power grids are woefully susceptible to failure during extreme weather. If it is extreme cold in Texas or extreme heat in California, it seems blackouts could become more common in the next decade. Part of the challenge we face is that utilities and power grids are regulated on a regional basis, rather than through a national infrastructure. The two largest states – Texas and California – manage their power systems quite differently. President Biden has pledged to modernize the nation's power infrastructure by moving to wind turbines, solar panels, and zero emission technologies by 2035. But I think this will be incredibly difficult to accomplish.

The fact is that issues involving renewable energy are extremely political, which makes accomplishing anything on a large-scale basis almost impossible. Texas governor Gregg Abbott cited the continued necessity of fossil fuels after power outages in February. Conservatives often point to California's rolling blackouts amid wildfires, despite the state's efforts to go green. Likewise, advocates of renewable energy point to the failures of Texas' largely deregulated "free market" system. The bottom line is that there is a lot of money – and political capital – at stake for any substantial move to renewable energy.