When we take an “all or nothing” approach, nobody wins. In every phase of my career, I have seen and participated in policies that produced positive and lasting results. Every single time, these results came from negotiations—robust discussions where compromise was the goal, not a sign of weakness.

The current debate amongst policymakers, industry professionals, academic experts and environmental advocates points to a clean and secure energy future for the United States with a mix of natural gas, nuclear energy, energy efficiency and renewables. From a technical and economic standpoint, natural gas should be the foundation fuel for this portfolio because of its efficiency, availability, affordability and the way it supports all of these other forms. We are not living in an “all or nothing” world. The goal must be to find a balance of national security, environmental protection and economic growth. I have said time and time again that our nation’s policies must align with economic reality for those policies to succeed.

In 1985, when I was serving in the U.S. House of Representatives, I received the “Legislator of the Year” award from the Oklahoma Solar Energy Industries Association. At the same time, in Oklahoma and elsewhere, hydraulic fracturing was being used to drill for oil and natural gas and had been for several decades. But through George P. Mitchell’s dogged determination and technical innovation, we have unlocked massive supplies of natural gas, which is now available at affordable prices.

There is no doubt about the economic, environmental, reliability, resilience and national security advantages from our nation’s abundance of natural gas. An IHS study commissioned by the National Association of Manufacturers estimates that lower natural gas prices are equivalent to an average of $1,337 put back into the pockets of American families. Meanwhile, the monumental growth of natural gas in the United States over the past few years has coincided with a growth in renewables. The United States is at its lowest annual carbon dioxide emissions in decades, with natural gas providing about two-thirds of the electricity to plug the hole left by retiring coal plants and renewables making up the other third. And direct use is leading to low and stable bills and a reduced carbon footprint: Households that use natural gas for heating, cooking and clothes drying spend an average of $840 less per year than homes using electricity and produce 37 percent lower greenhouse gas emissions.

However, not everyone in this nation is able to take advantage of these benefits—there are pockets of this country that do not have natural gas service. In this issue of American Gas, we look at how utilities are working with energy planners, regulators and policymakers to bring natural gas to new customers. The article takes a look at three states—Connecticut, North Carolina and Mississippi—that have worked to extend the benefits of natural gas to more of their constituents. This is a trend: Thirty-nine states have adopted or considered innovative expansion proposals, and that number continues to grow.

The crux of what is happening in our nation can be summed up in one sentence from the article. Mitch Gross, spokesman for Eversource in Connecticut, says, “The phones are always busy with people asking if natural gas is available in their neighborhoods.” Americans who do not have natural gas in their homes want it, and their leaders are looking for ways to deliver it to them. Natural gas utilities share this goal and are working to bring the benefits of this clean, affordable energy to every corner of this nation.