The Western States and Tribal Nations Initiative to export Piceance and Uintah basin natural gas to Asian LNG markets is gaining momentum, and the acceleration comes as our need to create benefits from our collective resources is as important as ever to not just our states but the world at large.

First, a little history. The initiative grew out of a memorandum of understanding between the Colorado and Utah Energy Offices, which established long-term collaboration in developing markets for those basins’ natural gas to help strengthen and benefit both states’ rural economies.

The initiative’s momentum gained speed when the sovereign nation of the Ute Indian Tribe and the State of Wyoming recognized the benefits and joined the effort. In April, the initiative issued a report assessing the significant resource base of the Piceance/Uintah basin as well as the economic and technical advantages of exporting Rockies natural gas to Asian LNG markets.

We first grew excited about this initiative because of the enormous economic benefits to rural economies in energy-producing counties like Garfield, Mesa, Rio Blanco and Moffat. That’s because the Piceance is so rich: the U.S. Geological Survey estimates there is 100 trillion cubic feet of discoverable natural gas there. That’s enough natural gas to power the entire state of California for 50 years!

Our energy-producing counties are subject to natural gas market fluctuations, which makes predicting local government budgets difficult. But we can stabilize our economies for decades to come by marketing our natural gas resources to places like Japan, China, India, South Korea and Eastern Europe and locking in contracts that last as long as 20 years.

What’s more exciting is that what benefits us locally will translate into geopolitical and environmental gains for the United States and the world.

By exporting natural gas to our allies, especially in Eastern Europe, they will no longer be held hostage to the political whims of Russia – which has never been afraid to shut off the gas in wintertime to punish countries.

The fact that gas from our four Colorado counties, the Ute Indian Tribe, Utah and Wyoming can be help our nation protect its allies makes our initiative even more crucial.

Our natural gas will also help our allies and the world achieve a cleaner, safer environment. Clean air and water are top priority for all of us, because we are raising our families in this community and providing a safe, healthy environment is non-negotiable.

We can extend that commitment to nations that are burning dirty fuels by exporting clean-burning natural gas produced in our states and counties, and significantly contribute to a cleaner and safer world for all of us.

There is one other benefit the Western States and Tribal Nations can share – poverty reduction. The World Bank estimates that, as of 2015, there were 736 million people living in poverty globally. One cause of extreme poverty is a lack of basic energy resources.

Our states and counties in the West can give them the tools to strengthen their countries and the opportunities to make the lives of our fellow neighbors abroad more secure. We have a moral obligation to export our natural gas resources to underdeveloped and developing countries in an effort raise people out of poverty.

Whether your motivation is stabilizing rural economies in energy-producing counties or our allies abroad, lifting people out of poverty or a contributing to a cleaner global environment, supporting the export of natural gas resources is the responsibility of all Americans.

Through this initiative, Utah, Wyoming, the Ute Indian Tribe and four counties in Northwest Colorado and the states that will join us in the future, will help lead the way in the United States for greater natural gas exports.

Rose Pugliese, Mesa County Commissioner, Chair

Ray Scott, Colorado State Senator, District 7

"We hope more elected leaders in Colorado see the crucial importance of policies that encourage all forms of energy development that we see happening in states like Utah and Wyoming that encourage natural gas and other clean energy."