

# The 18th Annual Energy Conference Recap



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## CONCLUSION

The following recap from our recent energy conference is comprised of our top ten takeaways from this year's gathering, plus 15 to 20 additional observations/data points we found noteworthy.

As a general observation, while industry protagonists are optimistic about durable, secular growth, they are also, increasingly, operationally stretched from the rigors of prosecuting the continuing industrial transformation of the domestic energy industry. The secular reality is that the depth and breadth of the domestic unconventional resource base is prodigious, while the cyclical verity is a depleted labor pool and stretched upstream value chain. Breadth and depth of resource vs. wherewithal to deliver colossal growth – this remains the most prominent tension characterizing the forward path for US production.

With respect to investors, energy specialists are increasingly optimistic about market balances for oil, and the concurrent evolution in E&P capital allocation, while generalists remain resistant to committing incremental capital to energy due to volatility, systemic underperformance and complexity. The biggest source of investor mystification is the continued divergence between crude net length exposure, which is close to an all-time high, and energy equity weightings, which are close to a century low.

Finally, we extend our profound thanks to those who attended this year's conference and contributed to an exceedingly stimulating week in discussing the key issues confronting the energy industry.

### 1. Upstream Value Chain, Particularly Labor, Is Much Tighter than Appreciated:

Virtually every single corporate participant at this year's conference expressed that the labor tightness remains unyielding and housing in the Permian remains at critically unaccommodating levels (more under "Additional Observations" below). Understanding the cyclical constraints is critical in formulating a plausible path for L48 production growth. While the domestic resource base remains vast and prolific, the tightness of the value chain will likely lead, in our estimation, to increased operational and cost friction. Interestingly, the Permian industry leadership, through the recently established Strategic Permian Partnership, is collaborating and brainstorming about resolving the singular challenge confronting the industry – the likelihood of drilling 110,000 horizontal wells over the next several years, with a depleted labor pool, an acute housing shortage (only 200 houses currently for sale in Midland), a woefully inadequate school system, stretched healthcare delivery and exceedingly taxed infrastructure. The contest and collision between the cyclical and the secular is amplifying.

**2. 2018 will be the Year of Differentiation:** Last year FANG authored the aphorism of the year by synthesizing 2017 as the "The Year of the Stumble" in characterizing the industry's operational challenges. This year FANG expects more of the same due to the tightness in the value chain. Thus, we are drawn to PUMP's characterization of 2018 as "The Year of Differentiation" – the difference between those who can execute and those who can't is likely to be acutely manifested this year. RSPP characterized 2018 as "The Year of Execution."

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## INDUSTRY RISKS

Oil prices are influenced by a wide array of variables including: 1) Global GDP and demand prospects, 2) Central bank influences impacting F/X, 3) OPEC supply, 4) Non-OPEC supply, and 5) Geopolitical risks.

**3. Wide-Range of E&P Capital Allocation Agendas:** While balance and calibration has become fashionable amongst the leading lights of publicly traded E&Ps, private equity sponsored enterprises are living well outside of cash flow due to the need to display operational delivery of cash flows. Moreover, PE sponsored entities are a considerably more prominent driver of domestic activity than many may imagine. Energy PE stalwart EnCap, for example, has 26 rigs running today (and rising).

**4. Scale and Scope Yields Advantaged Execution:** With an increasingly constrained upstream value chain, operators and service companies alike highlighted that scale and scope of operations are leading to differentiated support from service companies and more seamless execution vs. smaller companies which are in the early stages of developing their assets. With respect to service, winners will be either: 1) biggest-of-breed execution machines able to leverage scale and possess a mastery of logistics and supply chain and provide a suite of value-added solutions, or 2) acutely focused smaller/specialist enterprises able to provide exceptional, low-cost execution and service and whose local knowledge and long-standing relationships result in meaningful barriers to entry with regard to being displaced.

**5. Maintenance Capital Spending is Rising:** Given the relentless, and increasing, service and capital intensity, maintenance capital spending required to field a frac fleet has risen demonstrably since peak 2014. SPN's maintenance cap ex to field 750k HP is \$70-100M (as much as ~45% of this year's capital spending budget) – considerably higher than in 2014. Meaningfully increased requirements in order to stand in the same place, let alone move forward, was a comprehensively recurring theme from this conference.



*Billy Helms, COO, EOG Resources, Inc.*



*Jeff Miller, CEO, Halliburton Company (HAL)*

**6. Frac Pricing – Highly Variable:** The mythology on Wall Street is that pricing is uniform. The reality is that it is highly variable. Discounted providers are witnessing commendable convergence with leadership pricing. The rate of change regarding leadership pricing has slowed and pricing is only expected to modestly improve from current levels. Accordingly, the primary driver of leadership margins from this point forward is expected to be utilization and technology.

**7. M&A – Limited Appetite for Big Deals:** Consistent refrain across almost all the energy sub sectors – companies have limited appetite for big deals due to valuation and integration complexity. Plenty of ongoing appetite for tuck-in deals but valuation is a challenge. The exception appeared to occur amongst the gas levered E&Ps. With multiple E&P's trading below proved reserves, and striving to reduce unit costs in order to adapt to current commodity prices and realizing the benefits of increased scale, as well as benefiting from a more rational industry structure due to less fragmentation, there appears to be a higher probability within Appalachia of consolidation.

**8. Refining – 2018 Expected to be Best Year in last 2 to 3 years:** The macro refining outlook is the most constructive it has been in the last the last few years. A combination of tailwinds include: 1) tax reform related cash flow benefits, 2) strong global demand due to synchronized global economic growth, 3) improved global manufacturing, 4) well-behaved refined product inventories relative to demand levels (especially for distillate), 5) accommodating export optionality, and 6) reasonably accommodating crude differentials. Canadian heavy differentials, in particular, are expected to remain wider for longer, while tightening fuel specifications (IMO 2020) materially enhance the medium-term outlook – especially for heavy distillate producers and highly complex refiners. Crude export capacity out of the Gulf Coast is expected to continue to grow over time (max crude export capability may be 3 MBD currently) important for domestic oil pricing and the US crude oil inventory trend.

**9. Deepwater Major Project Economics Have Improved Dramatically, but Protagonists Remain Disciplined:** Offshore major project economics have improved to a greater degree than expected over the last few years, with much of these advancements structural in nature (STO major project break-even of \$21/bbl for next generation portfolio). The offshore outlook is therefore improved, with panelists cautiously optimistic on the forward activity outlook in the North Sea, Gulf of Mexico (US & Mexico), and Brazil. Yet despite improved economics and better spot oil prices, operators remain laser-focused on continuing to drive down costs. Thus, the pace of new sanctions could be measured.

**10. Investor Sentiment – Energy Specialists Increasingly Bullish, Generalists are Indifferent:** Energy specialists are becoming increasingly bullish due to their expectation that L-48 production growth will moderate due to cyclical constraints and the convergence with the reset in global long cycle production – against a backdrop of improved prospects for ongoing OPEC/Russian rational guardianship, stronger global economic growth, and elevated geopolitical risk and civil unrest (see Venezuela). This thesis, however, needs to play out in order to galvanize generalists, who are in show-me mode due to a high level of energy complexity, extreme equity volatility in recent weeks, and sustained relative underperformance. There is continued mystification over max net long crude exposure and eviscerated energy equity weightings.

#### ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

**1. Permian Secular Growth Agenda:** The Permian Strategic Partnership is comprised of eight of the leading operators (PXD, OXY, et al) and two of the top service companies in the Permian Basin. PXD's CEO revealed that over the next several years, 110,000 horizontal wells are expected to be drilled in the Permian Basin. Mr. Dove's expectation for YE'18 vs. YE'17 industry basin production growth is at least 720 to 840 KBD or 60 to 70 KBD/month.

**2. Permian Challenges – Housing:** Housing remains critically unaccommodating – currently only ~200 houses currently for sale in Midland. Increasingly, the upstream value chain is importing human capital on two weeks on/one week off rotations – expensive as well as inefficient.



*Dave Kistler, Sr Research Analyst, Piper Jaffray & Co.  
Timothy Dove, President & CEO, Pioneer Natural Resources  
Dave Stover, Chairman, President & CEO, Noble Energy, Inc.*

**3. Permian Challenges – Labor:** We've written repeatedly that the current Midland unemployment rate of 2.5%, hovering at all time low, converging with the secular increased call on US oil production presents an unprecedented challenge for the domestic energy industry. Virtually every single company at this year's conference identified labor as a critical and growing constraint. A few SMID service companies at this year's conference revealed that their human capital onboarding needs in the Permian are averaging +100/month – extrapolate this well beyond this subset, the constraints we've been highlighting migrate from an abstraction to a tangible reality/constraint.

**4. Permian Challenges – Quality of Local Schools:** The Midland school system, according to a leading upstream employer in the state, ranks amongst the worst in the state. Accordingly, convincing families to move to Midland is difficult due to the inadequacy of the education system.

**5. Midland Basin Downspacing Limitations:** According to RSPP, vertical/horizontal spacing beneath 400 ft results in well-performance degradation. Specific to RSPP, the company tested 350' to 400' spacing and experienced 6% to 7% degradation of well performance in some of the wells. Accordingly, RSPP will develop the Spraberry formation with 10 to 12 wells and has backed off 14 wells within that zone.



Bill Herbert, Sr. Research Analyst, Piper Jaffray & Co.  
Clay Williams, President & CEO, National Oilwell Varco

**6. Cost Inflation Expectations:** Prior to taking the impacts of the steel tariffs into considerations, the E&P's highlighted expectations of 10% to 20% cost inflation during 2018. Our multi-play panel highlighted expectations of stronger inflation in the Permian vs. other basins in the country. Moreover, uniformly, virtually every service provider with operations in multiple basins admitted that the Permian is their least efficient basin – while pricing is strongest in the Permian, margins are not.

**7. Steel Tariffs Impact to E&Ps:** The steel tariffs are primarily expected to impact tubulars. Based on commentary from one of our panelists and EOG's current presentation, tubulars currently represent ~10% of the well cost.

**8. Investor STACK Sentiment:** Poor following the Q4 earnings season given questions surrounding the appropriate spacing for development and resulting per well EUR's. Accordingly, all eyes will be on DVN's 24-well Showboat pilot (3 Meramec; 1 Woodford) which is expected to come online in Q2'18.

**9. Frac Sand Pricing:** Public players continue to expect delays in the Permian and forecast additional price increases in 1H'18 followed by flattish pricing in 2H'18, despite the wave of inbasin capacity additions projected.

**10. Rail Delays:** Since they operate a rental business model, last mile players will not be affected in the same way that certain mines might be.

**11. International Rig Tenders – Beginning to Slowly Revive:** Long-awaited international rig tenders, which have been characterized as long on optionality and dormant on pull-through, are finally beginning to awaken.

**12. Offshore Rig Newbuilds – ~Permanently Impaired:** Barring a few one-off harsh environment newbuilds, notwithstanding the resurgence in Brent, the outlook for offshore rig newbuilds is essentially permanently impaired due, in part, to the shift in capital allocation away from DW and, more importantly, the overhang of idle rigs.

**13. Offshore Rig Reactivations – Percolating:** While newbuilds are seemingly dead, 2018 should be decent year for rig reactivations due to the resurgence in Brent.

**14. Best Behaved International Markets in 2018 other than the ME:** Argentina, Norway, Russia.

**15. Weakest Int'l Markets:** AP, SA.

**16. Int'l Pricing:** Corrosive.

**17. Int'l Revenue Growth:** Activity gains are expected to be largely offset by savage pricing. Thus, overall revenue growth for larger cap service is expected to be only grudgingly (low-to-mid single digits) higher y/y in 2018.



Kevin Mitchell, EVP Finance & CFO, Phillips 66  
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**THE 18TH ANNUAL ENERGY CONFERENCE RECAP**  
FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 2, 2018 | LAS VEGAS, NV



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