



Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee

Senator Mary Jo White Chairman

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Letters to the Editor
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
34 Boulevard of the Allies
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Dear Editor:

In his recent opinion piece (*Under Siege by Marcellus Marauders*), Dr. Charles McColleston argues that in this “time of economic crisis”, Pennsylvania must adopt an immediate moratorium until we can “intelligently adopt adequate regulations and guarantee substantial tax revenues” for certain pet causes.

Why during this time of crisis, anyone would advocate for killing the only golden goose on the economic horizon defies logic. Certainly, no one disputes that we must intelligently regulate this activity to ensure that our air, land and water resources are properly protected. Pennsylvania does not enter this activity blindly. While the scale of Marcellus Shale drilling is certainly new to Pennsylvania, we have had a robust oil and gas industry in the Commonwealth for decades. Any comparisons to past industrial extraction, such as coal mining, which occurred before the enactment of environmental laws, is simply inaccurate.

There are several facts misstated by Dr. McColleston. First, we already know what chemicals are used in fracking operations. The list is available on DEP’s website, and is contained in the Material Safety Data Sheets at well site locations. By extension, our communities and our public sewer and water authorities also have access to this information. His claim that fracking wastewater caused the Dunkard Creek tragedy – a claim rebutted by an EPA study and corrected by this very paper – is irresponsible and false. Secondly, and perhaps more egregious, is his claim that gas drilling is exempted from the federal Clean Water Act. Dr. McColleston would have your readers believe that the industry is simply permitted to engage in any activity they desire, without consequence. The reality is that gas drilling is absolutely subject to the Clean Water Act, the state’s Clean Streams Law, the Air Pollution Control Act, the Oil and Gas Act, and numerous other laws and regulations. DEP has demonstrated this authority by taking aggressive action to shut down those operators who have not abided by our requirements.

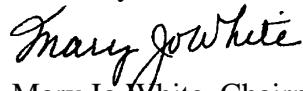
It appears that Dr. McColleston’s real goal is to ensure that Pennsylvania simply tax this industry to death, as is our apparent birthright. To argue that Pennsylvanians are under siege, with Marcellus drilling activity poisoning our water tables, sucking streams dry, polluting the air with toxic fumes – and that this somehow would all be remedied or on some level rendered acceptable by levying “substantial tax revenues” – is absurd. It must be noted that this activity has generated billions of dollars for landowners, including the state, through lease and royalty payments, as well as hundreds of millions of tax dollars through corporate and personal income, sales, fuel and other taxes. There are serious discussions underway as to the appropriate

timing and rate of a natural gas severance tax, but any suggestion that payment of a tax should be construed as a license to lay siege to Pennsylvania is ridiculous.

Without question, we must ensure that drilling occurs in a responsible manner. Thanks to increased permitting fees, we now have twice as many permit reviewers and inspectors on the ground than before the Marcellus rush. And we can learn from incidents like those in Clearfield County. My committee is holding a briefing on June 16th to examine this issue, and the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee will hold a public hearing on June 28th to receive testimony on natural gas emergency response planning and coordination in the Commonwealth.

It is fair to argue for increased regulation, or to advocate for a tax increase on industry and land owners. However, it is not helpful to mislead the public. Certainly, there are challenges ahead of us, but we should not lose sight that the Marcellus Shale play presents perhaps the greatest economic and clean energy opportunity of our lifetime.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Jo White".

Mary Jo White, Chairman
Senate Environmental Resources
& Energy Committee