

Question Gas Industry Propaganda

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Editor, News-Register:

The latest development in the ongoing saga of Marcellus development is the announcement by an industry spokesman to the Clarksburg Rotary Club of a "stepped-up PR program." And, sure enough, it was followed by a full-page ad in the local newspaper and even more ads on the TV stations. The speaker said the problem was the "false information" being dispersed "from Morgantown."

Accounts didn't say he mentioned the provocative siting of two new horizontal wells in a contaminated former industrial factory site, just above the water intake for Morgantown. Why it had to go there when all of God's green West Virginia is readily available to the industry is anybody's guess. We'll be seeing a lot of the older, immaculately groomed, severe, alpha females who represent them in advertisements. So look out media, here comes a bonanza.

I expect the media deserves a turn. Politicians have had a good run. The site Marcellus Money, an offshoot of Common Cause, follows the funds donated to Pennsylvania candidates and political action committees, at least the part recorded in the required public filings. It shows individual contributions to the extent of over \$7,000,000 to candidates and political action committees in Pennsylvania from the natural gas industry over the decade from 2000 to 2010. The top recipient was current Gov. Tom Corbitt, who received, according to the site, \$1,634,096 in the decade, of which \$1,083,315 was in 2009-2010 year from 216 donations. He was elected Nov. 2, 2010.

Corbitt is now stonewalling any tax on the industry, and dragging his feet on property rights, health and damage concerns. The previous Pennsylvania governor, Tom Ridge, with a similar public record, is now the top PR man for the industry in the state. His firm is paid \$75,000 month, according to an article in a Pittsburgh paper. Can any reasonable person doubt the same process is going on in West Virginia?

And the industry financed the orientation lectures on the Marcellus presented by the WVU Extension Service around over the state. Doubtless, other divisions of the university have been, and/or expect to be, beneficiaries. A member of the geology faculty has been an ardent advocate of Marcellus drilling, including speaking in the orientation lectures.

Now, according to Huffington Post, the industry has financed a trip to Washington, Pennsylvania for its supporters to stuff the meeting of the U.S. Department of Energy Natural Gas Subcommittee, and make the trip more palatable by throwing in a trip to see a professional baseball game. All this is PR, what in the past has been called "propaganda." The Marcellus industry can not or will not change the way it operates.

Most importantly, what the industry does not do is say, "We are now drilling along County Route so-and-so in Wetzel County. Come out and see the good work we are doing. Talk to the people and see how happy they are about what we have done." Or "Go out to the Salem, Wallace, Wilsonburg triangle in Harrison county and take a look at the what is going on there. Talk to the people. See how much support we have there."

This kind of experience is toxic to the industry's game plan. This most careful approach to gaining information has to be kept out of sight. The industry is telling people they do no damage over an ever rising chorus of complaints from those affected. Complaints are in direct proportion to drilling. There are dozens of Internet sites devoted to the Marcellus and other shale drilling areas, with more coming along every week. No issue has ever been so contentious for legislators with the industry shouting in one direction and hundreds of motivated volunteers shouting in the other.

Is propaganda the industry's only answer?

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