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Bradford County Commissioners

April 20, 2011

Governor Tom Corbett
225 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Dear Governor Corbett,

Issue after issue has arisen in Bradford County in relation to the development of natural gas in Bradford County. Most recently there was a major incident involving a well blowout in Leroy Township, Bradford County. This major incident is just one more issue our county is dealing with in regards to the development of the Marcellus Shale.

I have a number of concerns I would like to address in relation to these important issues that are unfolding in the county I was elected to represent.

DEP officials are quoted in the media as saying they spend as little as 35 minutes to approve each gas well permit. This is an appalling statistic considering the significant operations and impact of a natural gas drilling site and even more appalling considering that there have been nearly 2,000 gas wells permitted in Bradford County.

In recent weeks it has been reported that DEP is now requiring Marcellus Shale violations to be approved by top DEP officials before being levied on gas companies. This practice strikes at the heart of the integrity of that organization. It does irreparable damage to the local areas in the Marcellus Shale with the environmental damage that has become an everyday reality in Bradford County.

Well water contamination in Bradford County is a real and serious issue that is affecting residents' quality of life, livelihoods, families, and property values. Water buffalos, temporary water storage tanks, now lay claim to peoples' front yards as a stark reminder of the extreme negative impact that natural gas development is having on our local communities.

Last year I put much effort working for a severance tax that would include an equitable share for local communities. It was a failed attempt but a sincere effort to ensure our county is taken care of through this development. I continue to see our county, townships, and boroughs struggle with complex issues of development with no financial or logistical support from the Commonwealth. Emergency responders, volunteers, state and local police and dispatchers are working at a break neck pace to respond to immense traffic accident increases, well site accidents, and other related issues.

I have heard politicians in complete favor of the gas industry use the phrase, “We don’t want to kill the golden goose”. I would like to state, for the record, that the “Golden Goose” does not exist. It is no more part of reality than the Tooth Fairy, Santa Clause, or the Easter Bunny.

Lastly, I would like to address the outstanding issue regarding Bradford County’s lack of representation on your appointed Marcellus Shale Commission. Bradford County has had the unique experience of being the most drilled in county in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Yet, despite that fact, no one from our county was appointed to your commission. The fact our county was not taken into consideration is a direct insult to our county.

I have been working to, at least, find a way for some of our agencies to be heard by the commission or one of its work groups. To date I have not been successful. I have called and e-mailed the Lt. Governor’s Office and tried working through one of our state representatives to no avail. What a shame that a county with the most experience dealing with the impact of natural gas development seems to have been blackballed from comment to what will be your basis for setting Marcellus Shale policy.

I ask you to take our county and others like it seriously as you move forward setting policy in regards to Marcellus Shale development. The economic benefit of this development is unquestionable. However, it is also unquestionable that when left unattended, the negatives outweigh the positives quickly and heavily.

Best Regards,

Mark W. Smith
Chairman, Bradford County Commissioners

Cc: Secretary Michael Krancer
Representative Tina Pickett
Representative Matt Baker
Senator Gene Yaw