



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF PENNSYLVANIA

Statement by Olivia Thorne, President
Press Conference on Marcellus Shale Natural Gas Extraction
Monday, May 3, 2010
Capitol Rotunda, Harrisburg, PA

FRAC is a four-letter word, F, R, A, C. FRAC impacts everyone in Pennsylvania. It requires the immediate attention of all—from young and old, from rich to poor, from Pittsburgh to Easton, and from Philadelphia to Erie. Why? Fracturing is an explosive process that expels natural gas from Marcellus Shale, a rock that lies deep beneath two-thirds of our Commonwealth. Natural gas extraction impacts our water, our land, our air, our communities, our public health, and our economy.

Last June, members of the Indiana County League and other Leagues in the Marcellus Shale region, implored delegates at our 2009 convention to adopt a study of this issue. The purpose of the study on natural gas extraction from Marcellus Shale was to determine how our long-standing positions in the areas of Natural Resource Management and Fiscal Policy should be applied to this complex issue. It was imperative that we become informed in order to participate knowledgably in the critical political decisions involving this issue. We know we need to balance the anticipated economic boost to the Commonwealth with potential impacts on the environment, public health and local communities. We also needed to reach consensus on whether the League should support a severance tax on natural gas.

Twenty-seven local League chapters, in counties spanning the state from Washington to Susquehanna counties, became informed. How? They organized study groups, sponsored public forums with experts representing various viewpoints, visited drilling sites, and participated in webinars and other presentations at various universities and colleges. Earlier this year, over 350 members participated in consensus meetings that resulted in the position statement that we are releasing today.

Our findings and conclusions have led us to make the following observations on issues currently before Pennsylvania policymakers. First, there are the economic and environmental issues. Secondly, there are concerns regarding permitting, regulating, and monitoring.

We recognize the significant economic importance of extracting natural gas from Marcellus Shale. But we have serious concerns about the cumulative, long-term consequences of the process and the increasing number of accidents. We need to protect and conserve the pristine and nationally recognized public lands of our Commonwealth. Also, we need to plan ahead for when production ends and revenue ceases. Further, it is essential to protect future Pennsylvania taxpayers from bearing the burden of remediating the unanticipated consequences of natural gas extraction, production, and transmission.

The current economic crisis and its impact on state revenue have caused the Governor and the Legislature to look for new sources of revenue without raising taxes on Pennsylvania citizens. These new sources include leasing state lands for drilling and imposing a natural gas severance tax. Through consensus, our members have indicated their support for collection of a severance tax. Most other gas-producing states have one. Pennsylvania's natural gas consumers are already paying money to other states. However, we believe neither the severance tax nor the leasing of state forestlands should be used as a short-term fix for an ailing budget.

The League prefers taking the long view. We would designate severance tax revenues to monitor the public health impacts of natural gas extraction: to preserve and enhance all the natural resources in the state; to create

an escrow fund for supporting community adjustment as the natural gas industry grows and declines; and to conduct research on the effects of natural gas extraction from Marcellus Shale on the economy, environment, and public health of all Pennsylvanians.

Pennsylvania's state forestlands are a rich legacy of past restoration projects to correct the devastating consequences of the timber, coal, and oil industries. These complex forest systems are an important health, recreational, ecological, and economic resource. When roads are built and land is cleared for drilling, these new open spaces become highways for wildlife that do not typically go into a dense forest. Natural ecosystems are disrupted with potentially disastrous ramifications. Not only is the wildlife affected, but also the tourist industry that depends on the attraction of recreational areas for hunting, fishing, and personal renewal. The role of forests in preventing soil erosion, as well as water and air pollution, is also compromised. We support a minimum five-year moratorium on leasing additional state forest lands. This would provide essential time to compile data, review implications, and develop adequate safeguards. Additionally, the federal Environmental Protection Agency has recently agreed to conduct a \$1.9 million study to investigate the impact of hydraulic fracturing on water quality and public health. Let's wait to learn what they have to say. Our water resources, unprotected in many parts of our state from hydraulic fracturing, are too precious to compromise.

Secondly, we believe that permitting, regulating, and monitoring processes are still evolving to meet the demands created by those who wish to profit financially from Pennsylvania's natural resources. The centralized, streamlined issuing of drilling permits, without review of local County Conservation Districts, has created problems. Wastewater regulations have recently been revised but have yet to be implemented. Amendments are currently being proposed to bolster drilling regulations that do not adequately address the fracturing process. The volunteer efforts of concerned citizens cannot replace the consistent, systematic monitoring of drilling operations by adequate and appropriate State inspections. Time is required to bring essential money, manpower and expertise to meet the challenges of comprehensive oversight. Policymakers need to adopt the timeless adage of Ben Franklin, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

The League want to call your attentions to the enormous profits private industry will gain from the natural gas extracted from Marcellus Shale. History tells us that the prospect for big money encourages big spending on campaign contributions to gain access to decision-makers. Pennsylvania is one of only eleven states that places no limit on contributions to the campaigns of candidates for statewide public office. It is now, more important than ever, that this issue be addressed.

Our consensus did not address the fact that natural gas is a fossil fuel. Although it is a cleaner burning fuel than coal or oil, its use still contributes to carbon dioxide emissions that lead to global warming. In the long run, the discovery of greater access to large amounts of this cleaner burning fuel is no substitute for enacting policies that encourage conservation and the development of clean, renewable energy resources.

In conclusion, I would like to share with you Article 1, Section 27 of the PA Constitution:

The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people."

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