Testimony by Thomas A. Miller
Environmental Quality Board Hearing
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My name is Thomas A. Miller. I am a fourth generation oil producer. I live at 560 Route 16 South, Olean, NY. I am from New York but the Pennsylvania oilfield extends into New York State. If the refineries and supporting industries go down, I go down too. I have been working on oil wells since I was ten years old. I taught high school physics, chemistry and math for a short time after graduating from college but my real love is the oil patch.

The conventional 155 year old Pennsylvania shallow-well oil production industry is located in some of the most beautiful country in the world. This includes the historic Oil Creek Valley where there was once a forest of derricks in the infancy of the industry. This is fact. If you don’t believe me, go visit Oil Creek State Park and see for yourself. There was more oil in Oil Creek before the birth of the oil industry than there ever is today. The creek was named for the natural oil springs and seepages along its banks.

The oil produced by this industry, Penn Grade Crude, found only in PA, NY, WV and Ohio, is the most environmentally-friendly crude oil in the world, being the source for many specialties including personal care products and even food additives as well as high quality lubricants.

Besides being direct employment for thousands in western Pennsylvania and beyond, the industry is a very significant economic driver for the whole region. It is responsible for the employment of thousands more who work in other businesses that are providers of services and supplies. This is in addition to the tax base provided by the industry. The elimination of the oil industry would devastate the entire region but the effects would be felt all over the state and into other states as well.

Why should this industry be made extinct by inclusion in a new set of rules designed for a brand new industry (shale gas) that has very little in common with the shallow well industry other than the fact that it produces a resource from the earth? The need for many of these rules, even for the shale industry is suspect. The pressures encountered, the toxicity of substances involved, if any, as well as space required, traffic generated, and water usage for conventional wells is minuscule compared to the unconventional wells. My home water supply is a former oil well.
When applied to conventional wells, many of the rules are actually environmentally counterproductive. For, example, why is it necessary to carve a highway into a well location when not much more than a cow path is needed? The enforcers appear to be driven more by the desire to issue citations and show who is boss than anything to do with actual environmental benefit.

The purpose of the DEP should be to help the industry to operate in an environmentally sound, efficient and productive manner, not to harass it to death.

I understand that this is all being driven by so-called “environmentalists” who get their technical advice from celebrities and media bias and scoff at those who have devoted their entire lives to acquiring genuine expertise. One has to really question the actual motives behind these people. Why should state government give them more credibility than the hard working people who are doing their best to make a living and provide necessary and valuable resources that have made life better for all?

When the big corporations who are no longer in the picture, had large secondary recovery projects in operation they had single point discharges of thousands of barrels a day of produced water. Some of them actually kept the streams flowing in dry weather and some of the streams are renowned for their trout fishing. The government didn’t have a problem with that then but now a hard-working little guy trying to make a living is a felon for discharging gallons of produced water which is often beneficial to the vegetation by providing traces of nutrients.

In spite of this it is deemed right and proper for the State, itself, by the State itself, to annually dump hundreds of thousands of tons of unrefined deep-mined salt on the highways. You don’t see or hear the so-called environmental groups up in arms about this but it doesn’t bother them to constantly cite untruths, half-truths, misrepresentations and non-disasters to further their goal. Isn’t there something wrong with this picture?

If the Penn Grade Crude production industry is destroyed not only will it mean the loss of employment and prosperity to many but a tremendous source of a valuable resource will be lost that may never be regained. Over regulation is wasteful, environmentally and economically counterproductive and imposes hardship at least, and more likely, devastation on the lives of the people who are victimized by it. There has to be a balance between perceived benefits and the harm that comes as a result. All new regulations should be subject to honest regulatory review.

Shallow conventional wells must be considered separately from deep unconventional wells. The regulations that were already in place pursuant to Act 223 were more than adequate to address the conventional industry.
To the members of the Environmental Quality Board I ask that you please be aware of the grave matter of the human element involved when you make your decisions. The industry is run by real people who are all trying to live. It would be wonderful if they could concentrate on doing the best they can at what they do rather than having to constantly fight for survival. It is taking its toll on the lives and well-being of both them and their families.

Thank you.

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