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Catalysts for sustainable growth

Statement to
Allegheny County Council
August 20, 2013

**RE: Consideration of Permitting Hydraulic Fracturing for Natural Gas
in the Regional County Parks**

Members of the Allegheny County Council, my fellow citizens, I thank you for this opportunity to speak this evening on the matter of how the Allegheny County Council may best address the pressing call for development of the Marcellus Shale natural gas formation that underlies most of the land in Allegheny County. The issue is fraught with pressure for immediate action from industry to allow drilling everywhere possible, to generate the most gas, and capture the largest part of the emerging market as quickly as possible. To those who press for instant permitting without restriction, I bring a word of caution.

I have served as an energy and environmental policy advisor to the Governors of Connecticut and Alaska, and have served as a Commissioner of the Regulated Utilities Commission of Alaska where resource matters have been at the core of decisions. My career in utility and government energy issues spans forty years, with the last six years in scholarly pursuit and policy analysis. I do not come to this podium lightly, but out of grave concern for the public policy direction you may take on behalf of the people of Allegheny County now, and for the future generations who may follow.

We have reached a time in our technological achievements when we possess tools for permanently altering not only the landscape as we create spaces for buildings and roads and commercial establishments but also the entire life support system of the planet. We have the capacity to change irreversibly the composition of the air we breathe, the fresh water we depend on, the fertile ground we assume lasts forever. The resources laid down in fossil formations over the span of a billion years are being extracted and burned in

decades, reversing the processes that formed the free oxygen we breathe and sheltering us from the radiation of space. As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, we begin to see the cumulative effects of the 200 years of industrialized civilization based on burning fossil fuels. This is a transition time fraught with opportunity and with danger. This is not a time to rush with accelerated frenzy into a path of even more aggressive extraction and development of fossil reserves deep in the crust of the earth. This is a time of caution, measured evaluation and careful planning.

I urge you to take time to consider the long term well-being of the current and future citizens of Allegheny County as you examine your options here. We need to engage the debate on ethical grounds between the continued development of fossil fuels with public subsidies, including the use of public lands, or the deliberate development of renewable fuels that can be sustained without destroying the Earth. Energy policies at federal and state levels have supported the development of fossil fuels in many ways, including direct subsidies to oil, gas and coal development in the range of 7.2 Billion dollars per year hard-wired into the national budget. As we look at a transition to the renewable fueled economy already in progress, we see a less well-defined support system in law, in practice, and in mainstream familiarity for renewable energy systems. In times of transition, public policies can act as accelerants or as retardants. We can remove barriers to renewable systems by improving awareness, developing zoning and building codes to support zero net energy buildings, improving the regulatory support for distributed customer-based electricity generation, encouraging better energy storage and backup systems, and calling for use and best practices in public buildings.

It is the responsibility of the representatives of all of the people in Allegheny County for you to protect the values and assets in the public domain from destruction and wanton exploitation. The public Regional Parks take only 12,014 acres of the county, about 2.5% of the land. With approximately 11 million visitors per year and a population of just 1.2 million, you know that people visit their parks frequently. They are designed to fall within 30 minutes of the 97% urban area of the county. With clear examples of the decimation and degradation of the State parks from hydraulic fracturing as evidence, we know these precious few areas can rapidly turn to industrial zones. We have been spending hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in Pennsylvania reclaiming and attempting to restore lands denuded and excavated for coal mining. Now with the National Energy Acts of 2005

lifting specific provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act to allow hydraulic fracturing to occur at all, we need to stand firm to prevent destruction of our few regional parks. The Marcellus Shale gas industry is aggressive in putting forward promises of safe development and robust economic growth. The profits are relatively short term- 15 to 20 years, but the costs fall in the long term and on the public sector's shoulders. Long after the fracking industry has taken its profits and left town, we will be coping with the long-term effects as heavy saline solution saturated with underground hydrocarbons seeps into the groundwater and rises through fissures in the rock to places it was never intended to go.

We are a country based on the principle of a free market to spur our economy. But, freedom without responsibility and the wisdom of restraint yields chaos. Just because we have the technology to extract gas from 3000 feet under the ground does not mean we should. For the sake of our children and their potential grandchildren, I ask a pause, and a caution to preserve the public open spaces of the parks against further development.

I have the following suggestions for improving the balance between private profits and public costs attributed to hydraulic fracturing of deep shale for natural gas production, submitted to the Federal hearings on the Hydraulic Fracturing Accountability Act, as presented by Senator Casey in the 2010 Congress.

I urge the adoption of standards for siting criteria for hydraulic fracturing of natural gas shale deposits, as outlined here.

1. Protect farmland critical for food security. Marcellus shale formations in Pennsylvania fall beneath many agricultural assets identified by the American Farmland Trust. ⁽¹⁾ In many of these communities, the gas drilling and associated industrial facilities are distributed in small installations at many locations. To conserve the amount of total land that must be disrupted to support the extraction and processing and distribution of natural gas, the industrial facilities should be centralized and consolidated, made to comply with air and water emission permits, and have appropriate monitoring and treatment of produced water. Having numerous smaller facilities distributed throughout the state destroys the rural character of the area, and increases the difficulty of monitoring and enforcement at numerous locations.

2. Protect critical land uses. Marcellus shale development should be subject to siting criteria that include prohibition in areas that would require the drilling to penetrate through groundwater tables, prohibition in areas that would destroy critical wildlife habitat, including division and subdivision of tracts set aside as public parks, refuges and wilderness preserves; and prohibition in areas where organic farming or sustainable agriculture is the principal land use. In all of these instances, hydraulic fracturing would permanently destroy the prevailing use of the land. A Pennsylvania DCNR analysis shows that no additional leasing involving surface disturbance can occur without significantly altering the ecological integrity and wild character of our state forest system. (2)ⁱ Precaution in protecting watershed, wilderness and food supplies is a critical need in the public interest of the citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

3. Establish siting criteria for industrial facilities in rural areas. Marcellus shale drilling and processing facilities should be subject to the same restrictions as apply to any industrial activity in proximity to residences, schools, public facilities, schools, or historical and cultural assets of a community. Distance setbacks, noise and air and water pollution abatement must be assured to the residents of communities from the imposition of industrial facilities in their midst. This should not rest on the shoulders of individual land holders whose negotiating skills are not equivalent to corporate gas development interests.

4. Establish an escrow fund to provide for future cleanup. Marcellus shale development should be subject to a tax and license fees, some of which must be placed in escrow to provide for the future de-contamination of public water supplies. As the salinity of rivers and streams increases, as already evident in the Monongahela River, the water drawn from these rivers for public water supplies will need to be treated in ways not currently covered by existing operations. If stringent controls will not be placed on the industry to prevent contamination of ground water, wells and surface water supplies, then there must be a mechanism for public funds to be provided to clean up hydrocarbon and salt contamination in the future. It is the nature of the hydraulic fracturing process that the plume of contaminants underground may take a span of time to manifest under current detection systems. Models of concentrated salt solution behaviors in water tables has indications of contamination in the future as pipes penetrating the layers through groundwater above the shale formations will fail over time and lead to contamination in the future. (3) Extraction of the gas is expected to last for

20 to 50 years, at most, but the results of the contamination will be manifest gradually over 200 years from the present. It is a question of intergenerational justice to address the prevention of contamination, and to provide for cleaning the water.

Industry claims of groundwater protection from encasing the drilling pipes in concrete do not withstand the evidence of history. The oil industry events of the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in April 2010 that spilled millions of gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico at the mouth of the Mississippi River had similar confidence in protective technology.ⁱⁱ Now, reports of tritium contaminated water leaking from 45 of the 66 operating nuclear power plants in the U.S. offers more evidence of the failure of concrete encased pipes to leak over time.⁽⁴⁾ In the Marcellus Shale operations, the pipes carry highly saline and known corrosive materials both in the fracturing fluid and in the produced water extracted from the depths. These materials will, certainly, be subject to failure as time proceeds.

There has been no successful remediation of contaminated groundwater. This is an absolute time for taking precaution to protect the public interest.

5. Require accountability for contamination. The industry must be required to take accountability for all materials deposited into the streams and watersheds from produced water. Closed system use with full removal of contaminants to safe drinking water standards must be practiced to prevent contamination of water supplies for people and all other living systems that depend on fresh water. Only 3% of the water on earth is fresh water. It must be conserved to prevent the need for purification processes at great public cost, loss of fertility of land due to increasing salinity, and cumulative toxicity to farm animals and affected flora and fauna in the area.

The national energy crisis will not be solved with frantic lurching after domestic fossil fuels to replace imported oil. We must turn the attention and American ingenuity to the task of living as a society within the carrying capacity of the Earth on a sustainable basis. We are burning coal, and natural gas and using nuclear fission to produce electricity through technology developed in 1865. The Rankine cycle loses 66% of the fuel value to wasted heat, with only a third converted to electricity.⁽⁵⁾ More of the value is lost in transmission of the electricity to users, and more again in the end use appliances and machinery. This archaic system must be updated to modern times with distributed systems, such as fuel cells, and renewable sourced technologies, which do not waste more than they use to do productive work. We also have an enormous loss of fuel value in the

transportation sector. Fuels burned as gasoline or gasoline substitutes in the internal combustion engine use only 12% of the fuel value to move the vehicle forward.⁽⁶⁾ All the rest is lost as friction or heat! These technologies of the horse and buggy days are still controlling our future plans for energy policy. (The internal combustion engine was invented in 1865)

We must break the pattern of entrenched inefficiency built into the infrastructure of our economy. It is time to call common sense into play here. Stop the insane stampede to despoil everything that is natural and sustainable in the pursuit of a hollow promise of plentiful, cheap fuel. It is too dear to waste in archaic systems. Design for sustainability on a system integrated approach combining geothermal heat pumps, passive and active solar power, wind and a modest use of fossil fuels. Natural gas and other fossil fuels should only be used in efficient technologies that do not waste fuel value in gross combustion conversion processes. We will destroy the viability of our planet if we continue on the path we travel now. We must place a prime priority on protecting the life support system of all living things, including people: clean air, pure water, fertile soil and the biodiversity of species on the Earth.

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- ⁱⁱ 1. American Farmland Trust. "Farming on the Edge: Sprawling Development Threatens America's Best farmland." 2007 National Resources Inventory data. www.farmland.org
- 2. ["Policy for the Evaluation of Impacts of Oil and Gas Development on State Parks and State Forests"](#) Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources report 2011
- 3. Michael Boufadel, Ph.D. "Long Term and Cumulative Assessment of the Impact of Marcellus Shale Drilling" Presentation at University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health. November 19, 2010
- 4. Jeff Donn. "AP IMPACT: Tritium leaks found at many nuke sites." June 21, 2011. Associated Press
- 5. Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories. 2012 "U.S. Energy Use in 2010." Based on data from DOE/EIA- 0384(2009) published August 2012
- 6. ibid