

EDITORIAL

We must mean what we say

Newspaper joining call for moratorium on new Marcellus drilling permits

“When I use a word,” as Lewis Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty said, “it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.”

The word moratorium, a temporary prohibition of an activity, has been thrust into the debate over Marcellus shale drilling.

We agree that this word — moratorium — now has a place in this issue and join the call of 23 members of the House of Delegates to halt new permits being issued to drill in the Marcellus shale natural gas field.

We urge the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to use its emergency authority to temporarily freeze the issuance of new horizontal drilling permits.

Some might think we have fallen off the wall by taking this position. However, in light of the Legislature’s failure to approve legislation regulating this drilling and the acting governor’s failure to call a special session on this issue, we have no choice.

It’s clear to us that the DEP lacks the regulations needed to ensure our state’s water quality, land use and safety, and it doesn’t even have enough inspectors to oversee these gas wells.

Though no members of the Senate have joined this call and only a few Republican House members have, we cannot afford to sit on decorum or play politics with this issue.

No one is discounting the jobs and tax revenues that accompany this drilling and these well operations. They are vital to our state’s residents.

The benefits of Marcellus shale drilling would not be wasted on anyone.

The severance tax revenues alone could repave and

repair all our roadways, for instance.

Yet, we cannot surrender the safety and quality of life for present and future generations of West Virginians. We still recoil from the results of unregulated mine operations in West Virginia that were allowed to devastate our environment for decades.

Clearly, the horse is already out of the barn. One recent industry-funded study, according to The Associated Press, counted more than 2,800 state permits issued for Marcellus wells, and found that drilling is under way in 45 of the 55 counties.

Meanwhile, the DEP is in an underfunded, understaffed predicament. Not to mention lacking regulations for oversight of Marcellus drillers.

We do not take this position on a moratorium on new permits, lightly. It's safe to say we have never taken such a position previously on any industry.

But if our state is to reap the rewards and ensure our quality of life by allowing drillers to tap the vast, mile-deep shale field, we must regulate this industry.

And we must mean what we say.