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Marcellus — again

Get lawmakers on the same page, and do regulations the right way

— Yes, we are being repetitive, but the issue is too important to let it lie unnoticed.

Regulation of Marcellus shale drilling — it has to be done right.

And acting Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin's notion to let the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection handle it is not the way to go.

So — we reiterate our call for a drilling moratorium until a special legislative session can be called. At least one-fifth of House of Delegates members apparently agree; Friday 20 of them signed a letter to DEP Secretary Randy Huffman to use his emergency authority to halt the issuance of new horizontal drilling permits in the Marcellus shale.

Tomblin is right on one point. The taxpayers of the state do not need lawmakers in Charleston for an undetermined number of days as they wrangle the issue to consensus.

We think it would be better all around if the House and Senate leaders can come to some agreement on proposed legislation, then have the governor call their brethren to town for the session.

It is on Tomblin's other points that we disagree.

The DEP does have the authority to make regulations. However, as we have stated previously, the job is one for legislators. Laws directing the Marcellus drilling must be definitive and reflect the ideas of both constituents and the industry.

The governor asked the Legislature to appropriate \$2 million in the new state budget to help fund eight to 10 new inspectors, but the funds were not included in the document the House and Senate settled on.

To regulate Marcellus the right way — and to avoid the mess that has been our coal industry — will no doubt take much more than Tomblin had requested.

And no offense to DEP, but what if its rules miss a crucial need or there are errors in drafting them? What happens then? How long will it take to get it corrected? Will it be corrected?

With natural gas prices low, now is the time to call for a moratorium on drilling until regulation of Marcellus can be done right. The gas isn't going anywhere, and making sure it is properly extracted won't change that.

Let's get everyone on the same page and get the job done.

And while on the subject of unity on Marcellus, we have to ask the question of the partiality of some legislators' will to get it done.

A story in our Friday edition featured a list of lawmakers from both houses of the Legislature and both sides of the aisle who received campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry last year.

We aren't pointing any fingers; we're just sayin'.