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Morgantown citizens protest at Capitol

Anti-fracking rally held on eve of talks about state regulation

BY DAVID BEARD

The Dominion Post

CHARLESTON — Anti-fracking activists and folks who just want better industry regulation rallied at the Capitol steps Monday morning, a day before the Legislature's Marcellus select committee begins its public deliberations on new laws.

"We are not here to criticize fellow West Virginians or take jobs away from them," said rally



JUDGE SUSAN TUCKER to preside over suit against city.

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PRESTON COMMISSION at odds over landfill. **Page 7-A.**

co-organizer Kathy Cash, a member of West Virginia for a Moratorium on Marcellus (WV4MOM).

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David Beard/The Dominion Post

Anti-fracking activists display signs at a Monday rally organized by Morgantown-based West Virginia for a Moratorium on Marcellus at the Capitol's North Circle.

PROTEST

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The economic gains from Marcellus drilling are not worth what is lost in terms of pollution and quality of life, she said.

“We will not become collateral damage to the industry.”

WV4MOM is the new name of the Morgantown concerned citizens group that arose in the wake of news that there were drilling operations at the Morgantown Industrial Park. Its focus spread across the state with Monday’s rally.

While the crowd ebbed and flowed, upwards of 200 people had gathered at the Capitol’s North Circle during the early portion of the four-hour rally. With the sun broiling the concrete circle, rally-goers took cover under shade trees off to the side. The podium on the stairs faced straight ahead, and speakers had to angle themselves toward the crowd.

Groups of speakers alternated with interludes of music.

Writer Denise Giardina drew cheers when she suggested the entire Legislature be voted out and replaced with the city councils of Lewisburg, Wellsburg and Morgantown. Lewisburg passed a fracking ban with-

in its city limits, while Morgantown and Wellsburg passed bans extending a mile beyond their boundaries.

The crowd didn't indicate it wanted to vote local Delegates Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, or Mike Manypenny, D-Taylor, out of office. Both are members of the House Judiciary Committee and they worked together on environmental aspects of the Marcellus bill that ultimately failed during the regular session. Both addressed the crowd Monday.

Fleischauer is a member of the 10-person select committee that meets at 6 p.m. today. "I think the stars are aligned," she said. "We can get a strong bill."

Manypenny said constituents concerned about themselves or family ask him not to over-regulate the industry and drive it away. His response: "How much regulation is too much? How much water pollution is too much? ... There isn't too much regulation when it comes to protecting the environment and the health of our citizens."

Nancy Powers, from Harrison County, sat in a chair in the shade, bearing a tiny sign, "Water Quality Before Profit." The property adjoining hers has four wells in various stages of progress,

Gas industry on hand

In light of the rally, gas industry officials made themselves available for comment.

David E. Drennon, manager of transportation and marketing for HG Energy LLC in Parkersburg said that while many fear cracked well casings could contaminate aquifers, "regulations currently in place and industry practices have proved to be very effective in preventing those issues."

HG is an oil and gas company that plans to begin Marcellus drilling late this year or early next, in Wetzel County. Regulations in place are effective, he said.

He noted that while the combination of horizontal drilling and fracking is just a few years old, fracking itself has been around a long time. There are more than 1 million fracked wells across the country.

While there are also incidences of spills around the country, they're relatively uncommon, he said. They may stem from a piece of faulty equipment or human error, but the industry learns from each one.

"Each one of those is something you do your best to prevent," he said. "No one wants that to happen."

Maribeth Anderson, direc-

and 20 rigs in northern West Virginia are operating under that framework.

The industry, she said, will work with the governor, the Legislature and environmental stakeholders to develop rules to give residents and the industry more certainty.

Drilling "can absolutely be done safely and responsibly," she said. She thinks, though, that a drilling moratorium is off base. "To call for a moratorium on the Marcellus shale is to turn your back on a world of opportunity.

"Natural gas operators are continuously improving and working to address many of the concerns you heard about today," she said of the rally. "We know that people are concerned about drawing from surface waters to fracture wells. So our technicians and engineers went to work to find out how to re-use the water that returns after the well is fracked. Because of that re-use, our sourcing needs for water, and our disposal needs, are much, much less.

Used frack water is flowed into steel tanks, not earthen pits, she said, and lists of fracking chemicals are reported at fracfocus.org.

"Safety and strict environmental compliance are

and she's concerned, she said, about natural radioactivity in drill cuttings brought to the surface and hauled to landfills. "We're all going to be exposed to that," she said.

tor of Corporate Development for Chesapeake Energy Corp., echoed Drennon's thoughts on regulation. "There is a framework of state and federal rules that governs Marcellus drilling,"

always top of mind," she said. "All this happened in advance of regulation. It happened because we want to be responsive to the concerns of people who live near our operations."