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Drilling industry changes Northern Tier jobs outlook

May 20, 2011

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There was a time when the state's Northern Tier, the most rural part of our region, was viewed as an economic deadend by many observers.

The Marcellus Shale gas drilling industry has changed all that to the point where that area is posting unemployment drops that are the envy of the rest of the state and nation.

February's preliminary unemployment figure the latest available sets the jobless number at 6.1 percent.

That's down two percentage points from March and about three percentage points compared to the national unemployment rate.

We understand the criticisms and trepidation regarding the natural gas drilling industry. Some of it has been repeated in this space.

But the Tioga County unemployment numbers for February are just the latest factual data that underlines how silly the claims that the industry isn't creating jobs are.

And the spinoff economic impacts may be just as great.

There are two new motels being built in Mansfield and one in Westfield and two Wellsboro motels are expanding and adding rooms. Does anyone really think that would be happening without the growth and long-term prospects of the gas drilling industry in the Northern Tier and the rest of the region?

And that expansion is creating real benefits for Tioga County. The local hotel tax revenues have gone from \$7,600 in 2008, before the drilling, to \$264,000 in 2009 and \$365,000 in 2010.

Additionally, private sector road construction in several drilling counties exceeds the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's budget for those areas, another economic boost to local communities.

So we get the environment and local infrastructure concerns and share them but the claims that this industry is not having a huge impact on the job market of the region are not factually accurate.

Tioga County's employment numbers are the latest proof of that.

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