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MARCELLUS SHALE DRILLING

Natural gas company official: Industry will stay in Pa. awhile

Proposed tax, worker training discussed at CBICC event

Nick Malawskey - nmalawsk@centredaily.com

July 1, 2010 10:38am EDT

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COLLEGE TOWNSHIP — Even as state lawmakers debate a Marcellus Shale gas extraction tax, Brian Grove, a corporate spokesman for Chesapeake Energy, knows one thing is certain.

The natural gas companies that have started moving into Pennsylvania are here to stay — probably for decades.

"Most Pennsylvanians still don't see it as real," he told a Chamber of Business and Industry of Centre County gathering Wednesday morning. "In northeastern Pennsylvania, where I'm from ... we have 19 drilling rigs right now active in the northern tier. That's as many, right now, as our company has in the Barnett Shale in Texas."

He warned however that a heavy extraction tax, such as the one proposed by state Democrats, could retard the growth of the industry.

That has been the industry's position during the past few years whenever a severance tax has been discussed.

Grove said while the industry does not oppose an extraction tax, it favors one that exempts the first three years of a well's production. That, he said, would allow the companies to recuperate the costs involved in drilling.

"The industry as a whole feels the governor's proposal is not good for the industry," he said, later adding that "how that tax is done is crucial to maintaining the growth and bringing continued investment into this area."

The state General Assembly will likely work through August to hammer out an extraction tax proposal that will pass both the Democratic-controlled House and the Republican-controlled Senate.

Grove spoke alongside David Passmore and Rose Baker, two Penn State professors who study work force education and labor development, as well as Kevin Garber, an environmental lawyer. The talk attracted more than 200 people from the local business community, a record for a CBICC morning event.

While the extraction tax was one of the topics the four speakers touched upon, it was not the only one. The potential benefits of Marcellus Shale drilling were also discussed at length.

Both Passmore and Baker said the potential economic and employment impacts of the industry are large, but also said that Pennsylvania will need to ramp up work force training to prepare individuals to work in the industry. Positions within the industry often require experience or technical training.

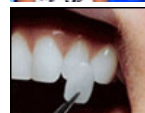
Baker noted that for every well drilled, there are more than 410 people employed in more than 150 occupations. But she also cautioned that most of those jobs are of a temporary nature.

The employment of a well "actually works out to 11.53 full-time equivalent" positions for each one, she said.

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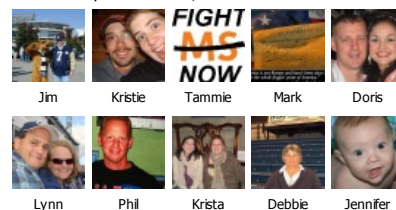
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