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# Ridge: Pursue union of gas industry, environment

February 13, 2011

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Partnerships.

It was the most important word former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge used during a gathering last week of the Marcellus Shale Coalition.

Along with the job creation and overall boost to the local economy, there has been a fair share of environmental panic over the Marcellus Shale gas drilling boom in the region. And, make no mistake, there have been violations and fines issued for irregularities by the state Department of Environmental Protection.

And that is as it should be. This state's calling card is a world-class outdoor portfolio of streams, lakes, rivers, forests and hills made for hunting, fishing, biking and hiking. Inflicting environmental damage and water contamination on that portfolio cannot be tolerated.

And as far as we know, no one is giving the gas industry a free pass regarding treatment of the environment.

But Ridge correctly pinpointed that this is supposed to be a partnership between those invested in the gas industry and those invested in the environment, not an open conflict.

Perhaps the most salient point that gets missed amid the environmental panic is that it makes no sense for the gas industry to skirt the safeguards it is bound to live by.

The industry intends to be here at least a generation. There are economic riches to be had, or the industry would not be here.

Why would this industry want to jeopardize its own windfall by trampling the environment? It makes no sense.

Rather, what the industry wants, according to Ridge, is a partnership with groups that want to protect the environment.

And the payoff is worth pursuing. The region's jobless rate of 8.2 percent is below the state's overall 8.5 percent and the nation's 9.4 percent, much of that trend directly attributable to the natural gas industry.

And the industry's success in the region could reduce the nation's dependence on foreign oil using, as Ridge described it, resources "the Lord gave us."

The last we checked, reducing dependence on foreign oil was a top energy goal for this country.

A better long-term economy. Protection of the environment. Decreased dependence on foreign oil.

All these things are more possible through a partnership between the gas industry and environmental interests rather than a conflict based on pre-conceived notions and knee-jerk reactions.

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