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[TV report focuses on gas drilling](#)

Industry supporters, opponent comment on Sunday's '60 Minutes' segment taking a look at Marcellus Shale development.

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A primetime network news show's look at the pros and cons of the natural gas drilling phenomenon in the United States that aired on Sunday left people on both sides of the issue satisfied with fair coverage but concerned that comments from those who were interviewed were misleading or inaccurate.



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An approximately 20-minute segment of the Emmy Award winning CBS news program "60 Minutes" titled "Shaleionaires!" featured correspondent Lesley Stahl interviewing a drilling company executive, some farmers who struck it rich by leasing their farms for drilling as well as

some Pennsylvania residents who say their water was contaminated by natural gas drilling activities.

Though the segment didn't cover any ground that hasn't already been reported in newspapers covering issues surrounding drilling into the shale formations deep beneath parts of Pennsylvania, Texas, Colorado, Louisiana and West Virginia, it certainly increased exposure to those issues.

"Natural gas has been the ugly stepchild of our national energy debate," Stahl said in her opening remarks, explaining that it never "enjoyed the political muscle" of oil or coal or "(captured) the imagination like solar panels and wind farms."

Now, she said, that stepchild is being touted as the "hope of the future, the answer to our energy problems" and has been creating "shaleionaires" – land owners who stand to make hundreds of thousands if not millions on royalties for leasing their land to the gas extraction companies.

Chesapeake Energy CEO Aubrey McClendon told Stahl the United States has "the equivalent of two Saudi Arabias of oil in the form of natural gas." Stahl noted natural gas is a much more clean burning fossil fuel, with nearly half the carbon emissions of coal and no mercury.

Stahl said 10,000 wells will be drilled in northwest Louisiana in some of the poorest communities in the country before interviewing two Louisiana farmers who struck it rich overnight, one having made \$400,000 in royalties and a second who made nearly \$2 million.

Stahl compared the phenomenon to a "good, old-fashioned gold rush," having brought more than 57,000 local jobs to the region. She visited with residents of Dimock Township in Susquehanna County, which she likened to a "ghost town."

She explained the process of hydraulic fracturing, the process of pumping millions of gallons of water with sand and some chemicals into the ground to stimulate the release of gas, and listened to Dimock residents tell how their water wells were contaminated with methane after the process began in their community.

One resident held a lighter to a jug he was filling with water from his well and flames shot out.

Chris Tucker, of EnergyInDepth.org, an organization that promotes the benefits of natural gas drilling, said the segment was "fairly balanced," although the show didn't get everything right.

"I think they did a great job of telling the story of real people, everyday people, all across the country whose lives have changed for the better thanks to the development of this clean, American resource," Tucker said.

"They didn't quite get it right when they attempted to venture into the regulatory history of hydraulic fracturing. The reality is that fracturing technology is among the most thoroughly regulated procedures that takes place at the wellsite, which is a big reason why it's been able to compile such a solid record of safety and performance over the past 60 years of commercial use."

Travis Windle, representing the Marcellus Shale Coalition, said "having '60 Minutes' underscore the enormously positive benefits of this revolution ... speaks to how transformational this

development is for our nation.”

It’s also important for viewers to understand, Windle said, that Pennsylvania has a long and well-documented history of naturally occurring methane entering private water wells.

“It will take private water well standards and fact-based reporting on pre-existing methane in water wells from shallow sources of contamination to demonstrate how safe shale gas development is,” he said.

Tom Giunta, founder and president of the Gas Drilling Awareness Coalition, provided a viewpoint from the opposite end of the spectrum.

While McClendon noted that natural gas is a clean burning fuel, scientists, Giunta said, have estimated that the diesel fumes from the thousands of trucks that transport the water and machinery, the diesel engines from the compressor stations used to pump the gas through the pipelines and the engines used for drilling and hydraulic fracturing, along with the natural leakage involved in methane escaping from the pipelines make the process one of the dirtiest.

And while McClendon said natural gas could free the nation from foreign oil dependence, Giunta said he “did not mention that they have already sold some of their gas leases to foreign companies, which in effect means we will be dependent upon foreign companies for our own natural gas that we will have to buy back on the open market.”

Giunta said Chesapeake sold part of the Eagle Ford Shale enterprise in South Texas to China, calling it “the biggest acquisition of a U.S. oil and gas asset by a Chinese company.”

As for the shaleionaires, Giunta said their neighbors “won’t have the luxury ... of moving away if the water supplies become tainted.”

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