

World & Local

To Frack or Not To Frack...That Is The Question

by Emily Cleveland - Lion's Eye Staff Writer- efc5051@psu.edu

Until recently, David Jones leased 250 acres of land in Pikes County, PA to Cabot Oil and Gas. Cabot leased the land from homeowners to explore drilling opportunities for natural gas. New laws, enacted by the Delaware River Basin Commission, have stalled all drilling and suspended the leases. Because of issues raised by environmental groups regarding chemical spills and contaminated drinking water. The Delaware River Basin Commission oversees the Delaware Water Shed, which supplies drinking water to 15 million people in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania sits on a 95,000 square mile rock foundation called Marcellus Shale, which is a prized depository of a natural gas called methane. Natural gas is the most abundant and cleanest burning fossil fuel available. In the past three and a half years, energy companies have stampeded into towns like those in Pikes County in a gold rush to drill for the valuable gas.

Big energy companies entice homeowners with a generous signing bonus to lease their land to explore for natural gas. If a well produces natural gas, the property owner receives a royalty payment. The farms in Pikes County, Pennsylvania are failing and citizens are out of work. Jones believed that the drilling companies would prevent the failing farmers from selling their land to developers, thereby preserving open space. The incentives offered by the drilling contracts were too good to be true for these people: thousands of dollars in bonuses royalties, and jobs: a tremendous economic boon to a poverty-stricken community.

Jones was the only remaining drilling advocate at a meeting in October 2010, when his neighbor, Craig Sautner, accosted him with a jug of cloudy yellow water, demanding that Jones taste it. Craig Sautner and his neighbors were angry, claiming that the drillers had contaminat-

ed their drinking water, ruined their land and were making them sick.

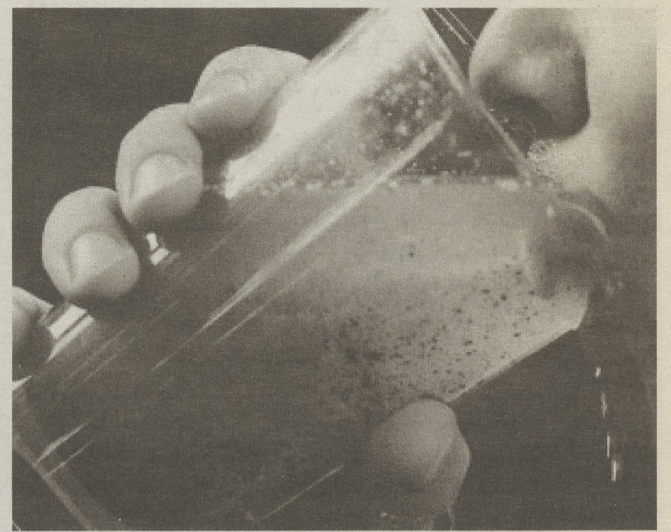
Norma Fiorentino is a resident of Dimock, PA. On New Year's Day of 2010, she found that her drinking water well had become a time bomb. For weeks, a drilling rig had been operating a few hundred yards from her home. They employ a method called hydraulic fracturing, or hydrofracking to drill down into the layers of shale. Once the drilling is complete, a high-pressure pump releases a mix of water, sand and chemicals into the well, which fractures the shale and forces the methane gas out. Apparently, stray gas made its way into the groundwater, and eventually into Fiorentino's well. When a motorized pump turned on in her well house, flicked a spark and caused a blast that tossed aside a concrete slab weighing several thousand pounds. Fiorentino is one of several Dimock landowners whose drinking wells exploded. There was so much methane found in nine other wells, that officials advised one homeowner that if he wanted to take a bath, he should open a window. Because of concern over contaminated drinking water, toxic waste, and health issues, 62 landowners from Dimock filed a lawsuit against Cabot Oil and Gas. Pat Farnelli was one of the plaintiffs. Her children developed stomach problems after drinking the water in her home. She said her neighbor's water, was cloudy and smelled like chemicals. It did not look like water either, as the picture illustrates. According to Farnelli, the water had sediment on the bottom, was the color of unpasteurized apple cider and was sludgy and greasy.

The Federal court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, who will each receive a share of \$4.1 million in damages from Cabot Oil and Gas. Cabot had to pay to install whole house mitigation devices in each of the 19 affected homes. Cabot had to reimburse the DEP \$500,000 for

its investigation into the problem. In November, Pennsylvania received \$12 million to construct a 5.5 mile water main to connect more than 14 households in Dimock to the water system of Montrose, a town about 6 miles away. The state intends to sue Cabot to recover the costs.

The controversy over Fracking continues to grow. On March 17, 2011, Senator Bob Casey introduced a bill, called the Frac Act, which would repeal a provision added to the Energy Policy Act of 2005, exempting the drilling industry from complying with the Safe Drinking Water Act.

On March 10, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett announced his new \$27.3 billion budget, in which he proposes the nation's biggest cuts on education, while refusing to tax gas drilling that is fast becoming one of the state's largest industries. Corbett insists that taxation would inhibit the growth of the drilling industry. With a state deficit of \$4 billion, it seems that taxing the drilling companies makes sense (and that cutting funds from the education system is not the answer). Corbett received nearly \$1 million in campaign contributions from the natural gas industry. He has appointed C. Alan Walker, the CEO of Bradford Energy Company to lead the Department of Community and Economic Development. It is no surprise to learn that Walker contributed \$184,000 to Corbett's campaign. Walker also owns other energy companies in PA. Governor Corbett has given Mr. Walker supreme authority over critical energy issues, including hydrofracking. Walker's job is to expedite any permit or action pending in any agency where it will impact the creation of jobs. It is hard to



Research has shown that drilling in shale can have serious side effects in an area's drinking water. (photo courtesy of waterdiscourses.wordpress.com)

imagine that Walker will be worried about the citizens of Dimock in his quest to fill his pockets. Big business and big money are influencing and taking precedence over regulatory agencies responsibility to protect the health and well-being of the citizens of Pennsylvania.

The possibility and probability of the multiple dangers of Fracking continue to mount in number and volume as more and more wells are drilled. The stakes are high and there is a lot of money to be made. It may be possible to tap this valuable resource, safely, in time. For now, the drilling industry needs a firm timeout while scientists are allowed time to study the issue of drilling for natural gas before setting policy on the use of hydrofracking technology. The residents of Pennsylvania need to take a stand and make their voices heard on behalf of the many impoverished towns like Dimock. Letters need to be written in support of Casey's FRAC act, and pressure must be put on big business to take responsibility for the environment, the people who work on the drilling sites and for the safety of the water supply in Pennsylvania.

Corman Could Be Key For PSU

By Nick Corrato - Lion's Eye Staff Writer- njc 5098@psu.edu

When the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and Senate reconvene, on April 4th and 5th respectively, they will face the task of passing a new budget. If passed as proposed by Governor Tom Corbett, the appropriation cuts to state-owned and state-related universities could have adverse implications for legislators across the state.

According to the website of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, state owned universities have an enrollment of nearly 120,000 students, of which approximately ninety percent are Pennsylvania residents. The website also boasts that four out of five graduates of state owned universities remain in the commonwealth after earning their degree, and that the total number of state school alumni residing in Pennsylvania is nearly a half a million.

In a March 16th article, Brad Bumsted of the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review highlights the fact that approximately 291,000 Penn State alumni continue to reside in the state. An additional 164,000 alumni of the University of Pittsburgh residing in the commonwealth bring the total number of alumni from state-owned and state-related

universities to over 950,000.

Not meeting the needs and expectations of this broad constituency base, which exceeds well over a million when currently enrolled students, faculty, and staff are included, could result in some legislators looking for a new career when their term in office is over.

However, Bumsted suggests that many legislators may only have to look in the mirror for motivation to alter Governor Corbett's cuts to higher education; ninety-eight of the 253 members of the General Assembly have attended or received degrees from state-owned or state-related universities.

Most notable for Penn Staters is Senator Jake Corman (R) of Centre County, who serves as the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Corman, who also serves on the Education Committee, is a 1993 graduate of Penn State, and current member of the Penn State Alumni Association.

Senator Corman, along with fellow legislators, has expressed intentions to make higher education a priority as the budget makes its way through the General Assembly.

Syrian Protests Turn Bloody

By Kenny Lankford - Lion's Eye Staff Reporter-kg15040@psu.edu

Protests in Syria have turned deadly due to the tensions between citizens and the government. Citizens have taken to the streets every Friday to oppose the way that the government is running, and rioting has been called unprecedented. Not only have the protests been the largest against President Bashar Assad, but they have also been the bloodiest. The number of protestors has been estimated in the hundreds of thousands.

Most recently, riots held in the city of Daraa resulted in Syrian security firing at protestors, killing twenty-five and wounding many others. The total death toll has reached more than 170 deaths.

The cause of these protests is a result of the way the government has been run for the past few decades. The current President Assad inherited the throne from his father over eleven years ago. Before him, his family has ruled for more than forty years. Initially, when he took power, Assad promised both social and political change, and claimed that he would take the country out of the former state that it had been in. Unfortunately, his promises have not been kept and have

reverted to the ways of his father's rule.

Tensions from citizens have turned into a snowball effect and now their disapproval has resulted in violent encounters with government officials. Syrians have wanted their freedom for over four decades of being repressed. The current government has isolated itself internationally and has had economic restrictions similar to that of Soviet Union. The government also has been operating under an Emergency Law since the 1960's which limits the constitutional protections that citizens have.

It was not even until the start of this year when the government has permitted the use of radio stations playing western pop music and websites such as Youtube, Amazon, and Facebook. There are still many more changes.

Protestors hope that they can change the ways of President Assad and the way that the country has been run for the past four decades. Citizens want the 48-year-old Emergency Law lifted finally and former political prisoners to be released, as well as clamoring for the formation of political parties.