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Senator J.D. Vance

288 Russell Senate Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Vance:

 I read with interest your op-ed which appeared in the August 26 edition of the Marietta Times. I would respectfully ask that you reconsider your enthusiastic advocacy for extracting oil & gas from the Utica Shale (“…double down on Ohio energy”) for three important reasons.

1. There is no evidence that natural gas exploration and extraction is contributing to the economic development, job creation, or population growth in Appalachian Ohio as evidenced by the following data:
* The oil & gas industry accounts for just 1.1% of Ohio jobs. (58,816 jobs out of 5.25 million) (BLS Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages [QCEW])
* Most O&G jobs are poor paying with little benefits. Over half of oil and gas jobs are in gas stations and convenience stores where workers make an average wage of $23,564 per year. (QCEW)
* The average wage for all O&G workers in Ohio, is almost $4,500 less than the average for all jobs in the state. (QCEW)
* The industry has not generated job growth. The seven counties that produce the majority of Ohio gas have lost 8,637 jobs since the Appalachian gas boom began. (Bureau of Economic Analysis)
* The O&G industry itself has added fewer than 4,000 jobs as its share of all jobs barely budged, going from 1.05% in 2008 to 1.12% in 2021. (QCEW)
* In Columbiana County, where E. Palestine is located, between 2008 and 2021, the number of jobs declined by 3,082, about 7%. And the population declined by over 5,000, almost 7%. (Bureau of Economic Analysis).

I have enclosed the report recently distributed by the Ohio River Valley Institute, which demonstrates that in central Appalachia, while natural gas production boomed, economic indicators and population declined. I know that you are interested in basing your legislative policy issues on facts and data; this report contains a lot of important data.

 As the author of *Hillbilly Elegy* and one who advocates some sensitivity to those of us who reside in Appalachia, we would hope that you would attend more directly to the needs of Appalachian Ohio.

1. Both houses of the Ohio legislature recently passed a bill that will allow high-pressure hydraulic fracturing (fracking) adjacent to public lands including state parks. The governor signed this bill and promised there would be no fracking on the public lands themselves. This legislation was pushed through in a furtive and deceptive fashion within a poultry bill, and there were no public hearings on the proposed legislation. Requests for permits, called “nominations,” from oil & gas companies (not identified according to state policy), have been pouring into the Oil & Gas Land Management Commission. We suspect that most of these companies are from out of state. Even though the governor stated there would be no well pads or sites in the state parks, all this drilling and industrial activity will have an enormous impact on the ecology of the state parks and on those living near them. There will be access roads, all kinds of trucks coming in with sand, water, and chemicals and going out with brine waste. Those who are concerned with this assault on our state lands are left with trying to influence the Oil & Gas Land Management Commission to deny these nominations. This effort is difficult enough and an even greater challenge given that so few people in Buckeye State know about this violation of our state lands.
2. Washington County, where I reside, has the highest volume of brine waste of all counties in the state. Brine waste is really a euphemism for the toxic and radioactive brew that is a product of fracking. We have seen evidence in our county and in other parts of the state that spills and seepage of this waste has occurred—even to the point of damaging and destroying production wells. Residents of our county—from many different political perspectives --have expressed their outrage about the excessive brine waste in our county. Our county commissioners have expressed their concerns to ODNR as well. With the additional fracking to take place on our state lands, we anticipate that there will be a significant increase in brine waste coming into our county. The biggest target of oil & gas nominations is the area immediately around Salt Fork State Park, the largest in the state; these well sites will be located just 50-60 miles from our county.

At the federal level you and your fellow members of Congress can help with legislation, such as the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act. This legislation will impose a fee on oil and gas (and other carbon emitters) that will then be returned as a dividend to citizens. That measure will at least provide some benefit to the residents of Appalachian Ohio as a partial balance to the many costs and risks which fracking imposes in our region. A further non-trivial benefit of this legislation is to address climate change, which has resulted in extreme weather that we have all witnessed this summer.

Sincerely yours,

George Banziger, Ph.D.

Encl: