

A Paean to Tom Shepstone, by David Slottje

June 29, 2013

"I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him."

(Julius Caesar by Wm. Shakespeare, Act 3, Scene II)

The battle for the essence and soul of New York State, now being fought between those who want to be fracked and those who would try to save the planet, has many noteworthy facets, one of which is the colorful nature of many of the participants. Both sides have their share of unconventional folks, but some of my favorites line up on the 'frack-me' side of the war.

I speak, for example, of the *courageous* blogger who relentlessly and scurrilously attacks fracking opponents, by name, over and over and over again, but who himself cowers behind multiple screen names – sometimes going so far as to refer to himself in his blogs in the third person: " ... and then Mr. [so-and-so] boldly stood up, and set straight the [particular town board in question] about the lies that [the anti-fracking attorney] had just told them." (Yes, **B**acon **L**ettuce and **T**omato, I'm talking about YOU.)

Or, the LYING – yes, thank you, I am VERY aware of what is involved when one uses *that* particular term – blogger who doesn't simply blog and defame anonymously, but is so cowardly that he goes so far as to 'publish' (look that term up, since we're on the subject of defamation) defamatory comments literally using a fake name. Not a screen name, mind you, but a fake/fraudulent name. (Yeah, Mr. Phat, I am talking about YOU.)

Or, the 'frack-me and frack-everybody else too' activist who goes from town to town, telling the town boards of various towns *where she does not live* that those Town Boards should not listen to people who (*like her*) don't live in the Town where she happens to be speaking (huh? really?), rudely pointing at individual town board members and *promising* that they **WILL BE SUED** in their personal (non-town board member) capacities if they pass a moratorium, literally giving 'the finger' to town board meeting attendees who disagree with her pro-fry-the-planet stance, and who *then* takes to the Internet to anonymously (see a pattern here?) accuse anti-frack people of being rude or disrespectful. (Yes princess, I'm talking about YOU.)

I could go on, but the person I really want to give his due today is Tom ("I didn't *lose* my planning association credentials; I simply decided that I didn't want to pay the association dues any more") Shepstone.

You see, it is my instinct and opinion – only that, only my opinion; I do not purport to *know* – that it is just a matter of time before Energy-in-Depth Marcellus and Mr. Shepstone part company. Again, this is no more than my instinct and opinion. But if I am correct that Mr. Shepstone could be departing EID sooner than later, then given the amount of column space that he has generously accorded to my wife and me over the past few years, it seems like it would be just plain *wrong* not to give him a tip o' the cap on his way out. (You know, kind of

like if the Red Sox didn't give a little nod to Alex Rodriguez when the Yankees finally decide enough-is-enough.)

Here's why I'm guessing Mr. Shepstone could find himself 'pursuing other interests.' It is my understanding that Mr. Shepstone runs the New York (State) project for EID Marcellus. EID Marcellus is itself a project of the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA), a very powerful representative of the most powerful industry on the planet. Given his title, I assume that part of Mr. Shepstone's job is driving (Internet) traffic to the EID Marcellus web site, and part of it is developing and implementing strategies to let frackers have their way in New York State.

Now, you may or may not agree with the politics of the Fossil Fuel Industry//IPAA//EID-Marcellus folks – obviously, I do not – but there should be no question that they have some incredibly smart and talented people on their 'side' of this war, and some of those people are *business* people. And business people pay attention to *results*.

So, while this war about whether industry has *proven* that it is safe to frack is not *even close* to being over, this does seem as good a time as any to see what EID's ROI (return-on-investment) in Mr. Shepstone might look like at this (admittedly) early point in time.

As to web site traffic, it appears to be down. Presumably EID's sophisticated business people will attribute at least some part of that to the sterling editorial judgments Mr. Shepstone has made with respect to what is and what isn't relevant to those who might consider using the EID site as a resource. Here are some of Mr. Shepstone's choices: "If trees could talk, they'd say 'Burn Natural Gas, Not Wood'; "Promised Land Missing its Mark with Film Reviewers"; 'Cabot Gives Away Toys at Christmastime'; "Town of Highland Gets Sued Over Natural Gas Ban" (ah, no, they didn't; I guess I must have missed the correction of that one when it ran); and "Norse Energy Shows the Way!" (whoops! might want to take that one down, don't you think?).

[[And by the way, if you do decide to look into taking down certain posts, you might want to examine the one entitled "Slottje Duo Hits a Wall in Bath" where, in a post "by Energy in Depth National Team," the head of the local landowners' coalition says he saw "**first hand** the other night in Bath" (emphasis added) an attempt by my wife and me to "pull the wool over the eyes of Steuben County residents," and that "Boy, did they get a surprise from the Village of Bath Town (sic) Board" and that "the Village Board saw straight through their act [...]"

One of the problems for Mr. Shepstone with *this* particular post is that my wife and I have ***never*** presented to or *even attended* a meeting of the *Village of Bath* Board or of the *Town of Bath* Board – not individually or together, not on the night in question, and not at any other time on any other date. (For that matter, I haven't been to Bath, Maine in years, and neither of us has ever been to Bath, England.) How - on Mr. Shepstone's watch - can the 'EID National Team' publish a dead-wrong, purported "first hand" account of an occurrence that actually *never happened*? Well, I have my own theories, but if *EID* really cares enough to find out, maybe they will start by asking Mr. Shepstone directly. The buck is supposed to stop with him, right?]]

Anyway, back to the web site. Giving credit where it is due, it does appear that Mr. Shepstone is now feverishly attempting to drive traffic to the EID site: as fast as he can type, he posts or causes to be posted EID Marcellus stories (such as those described above) to other, chiefly pro-frack landowner group-sponsored sites. But then, *instead* of simply cutting and pasting the story or blog *in full* on the site of the place he is piggy-backing – which is typically what one would do if one *really* wanted as many people as possible to have the information being presented (because each additional ‘click’ required to get to a discussion or post statistically lessens the chances that the post in question will actually be read) – Mr. Shepstone only posts *part* of the article, with a hyperlink back to EID Marcellus. By definition, that approach is not optimal for the ‘side’ Mr. Shepstone is being paid to represent, because it lessens the *overall* chances that the intended audience will actually read the story in question. But it *can be* better for Mr. Shepstone personally, because the (statistically) fewer people who do end trying to read the story must go through the link to EID’s web site to do so, and *that* gives Mr. Shepstone more additional ‘clicks’ that he can report as web site ‘traffic’ to his bosses.

OK, on to the second part of what I assume Mr. Shepstone’s job to be: convincing people who live in New York State that industry has *proven* that fracking is safe.

Now, when trying to refute an adversary’s contention (no matter the subject matter), I believe and I think most people would agree that the most *effective* approach is to deal with the opponent’s contention directly, by specifically addressing (and hopefully rebutting) the particulars of the opponent’s position. But Mr. Shepstone and his team appear to prefer a different, less conventional approach. Let me give you just a few examples.

(For purposes of the following examples, when I say “we” or “our side,” I mean people who believe that fracking is not a good idea, whether because the industry has not come even close to proving from a long-term perspective that fracking is safe, or for some other reason(s). And when I say “they” or “their side,” I mean Mr. Shepstone, bloggers who work for Mr. Shepstone, or bloggers on the various sites to which Mr. Shepstone posts things.) So here’s some of what I’m talking about:

WE say: that fracking – no matter how broadly or narrowly the other side tries to define that term/process – **HAS, IN FACT, been PROVEN** to have contaminated ground water sources. We say it unequivocally, without any qualifier of any kind, and in the case of my wife and myself, we say it *daring* someone to sue us over having said it.

THEY say: some of the clothes that Yoko Ono designs for her company to sell are expensive.

Hmm.

WE say: that the claims made by industry’s supporters as to the number of jobs to be generated in NYS if fracking is allowed in are in fact wildly inflated and misleading, and that the majority of the jobs that according to industry will be created in fact will not go to New Yorkers, and that most of the jobs that *might* go to NY-ers will be only temporary.

THEY say: one high-profile opponent of fracking in NYS (and in other places, as well) might not be heterosexual.

Hmm, OK.

WE say: that the notion that NYS has ‘the strictest (fracking) regulations in the country’ and that fracking opponents accordingly should take comfort that the health and safety of generations-to-come will be protected by NY’s DEC is *poppycock*, *balderdash*, and *nonsense*, because (among *many, many* other reasons) such regulations **do not exist**, and the Commissioner of the DEC *himself* relatively recently said that *if he wanted to*, he could issue drilling permits *without any such regulations being in place*.

THEY say: one high-profile Southern Tier opponent of fracking has over the course of his lifetime lived in many different places.

Hmm, OK.

WE say: fracking activities have the potential to produce a combination of negative impacts upon the environment and people living in or in proximity to the areas or communities in which such activities are located. Such negative impacts may include, without limitation, noise, vibrations, fumes, damage to roadways, degradation of water quality, degradation of air quality, decreased availability of affordable housing, damage to and loss of agricultural lands and soils, fragmentation of natural communities and valuable wildlife and flora corridors, and damage to tourism industries.

THEY say: that the young man who had the temerity to point out that Mr. Shepstone saw fit in *his own* gas lease to insist upon negotiating a provision that keeps fracking farther away from *his* house than the setback distances contemplated by the draft SGEIS to be the standard in New York State, is not credible because, inter alia, the young man graduated from college only several years ago, the young man works for the young man’s father, and the *father* was a “preppy” in college.

Alrighty then.

WE say: fracking activities typically involve a large volume of heavy vehicles, and accidents involving heavy vehicles have greater potential for death or serious injuries and property damage than those involving smaller vehicles. An increased volume of heavy vehicular traffic may cause, contribute to, or create unsafe conditions for the traveling public, and can result in traffic congestion that could delay emergency response times for medical emergencies, fires, and accidents. Further, increased heavy vehicular traffic tends to increase air pollution and noise levels, and to decrease the quality of life and property values for those living nearby.

THEY say: one high-profile anti-fracking activist does not seem to have any solar panels on his home.

OK, then. Pretty much rebuts the claim that fracking hasn’t been proven safe, right?

I could go on and on, but the pattern is I think quite clear. Now, is Mr. Shepstone's approach to winning hearts and minds effective? I do have an opinion (hint: in Latin there is a phrase, *res ipsa loquitur*, which means 'the thing speaks for itself'), but Mr. Shepstone would say that no one should listen to *me* because I live in what he calls 'Planet Ithaca.'

Anyway, much more interesting than what I think will be to watch how this unfolds from EID's perspective.

If I am correct and it turns out that the sophisticated business people at EID do not like the results Mr. Shepstone has delivered, I very much want to be among the first to tell A-Rod – I mean Mr. Shepstone – to enjoy whatever the next phase for him turns out to be.

If I'm wrong, and EID decides *not* to change pitchers right now, I can say from the bottom of my heart: "Mr. Shepstone, there are a great many of us waiting to bat who are very happy to see you on the mound. And please don't change a thing. Go ahead and stick with that curve ball that keeps hanging; heck, what's the worst that could happen?"

Signed with all due respect,
David Slottje