
THE RIVER REPORTER

Mis-representative Fritz

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By JAMES BARTH

On October 31, Jonathan Fritz, PA 111th district's state representative, organized a panel presentation with an agenda titled "DRBC [Delaware River Basin Commission] Drilling Ban."

The presentation was held in Waymart PA, and it seemed that both panel and audience had been personally invited by Rep. Fritz or his office in order to support his pro-drilling agenda.

Both Jim Hamill of WNEP and Eric Deabill of WBRE/WYOU were there to cover the meeting, and both reporters noted the obvious stacking of the deck (<https://tinyurl.com/y865n2k7> and <https://tinyurl.com/ybx78j3n>).

What is clear from Representative Fritz's public statements and his organization of this panel presentation is that he will not reach out to, or listen to the feelings and opinions of a huge number of his Wayne and Pike County constituents, let alone anyone in the broader Delaware River Basin.

Mr. Fritz aggressively ignores those of his Pike and Wayne constituents who are opposed to his desired industrial-sized, under-regulated, inherently contaminating onslaught of extraction, and describes those of us opposed as "outsiders" and "activists." This is far from the truth.

What is true is that a small minority of owners of very large properties would be the only ones who directly benefit financially from shale gas extraction in any meaningful way, while the vast majority of property owners would suffer the negative impacts on their health, community and property values.

I recently went to the Wayne County Tax Assessment Office and learned that Wayne County has 59,662 parcels of land, and that tax bills are sent out to 40,886 individual addresses. While the list of individual addresses is not an exact representation of the number of unique owners of property in the county, it gives a very good approximation.

I compared the 40,886 number to the Citizens Voice Newspaper database of land leased in Wayne County published sometime in 2010/2011. This leasing database shows approximately 3,491 landowners in Wayne who leased their land for drilling.

This amounts to an astonishingly small percentage of tax-paying property owners (8.5%) in Wayne County. This approximately 8.5% owned 52% of the land surface, however. To put this into a proper perspective, approximately 91.5% of property owners in Wayne had not leased their land, and they are the overwhelming majority, the backbone of the Wayne County tax base and economy.

I participated in a similar study by Damascus Citizens for Sustainability, on Damascus Township, PA in 2011. Those results showed that approximately 67% of property owners had not signed leases, and they formed approximately 61% of the tax base. The approximately 33% that had signed leases owned 69% of the land surface of the township (<https://tinyurl.com/y8vosvxd>).

As an example, look at the more than 70 hunting clubs in Wayne County. One has 1,788 acres and is assessed at \$151,300. Another has 150 acres assessed at \$14,800. Another has 102 acres assessed at \$8,400. Another has 174 acres assessed at \$20,500.

This acreage totals 2,214, and is assessed at \$195,000.

My wife and I have 25 acres and a house. Our assessment is \$230,800.

Rep. Fritz thinks that owners of large, mostly vacant land, a majority with little or no housing improvements, owners who pay comparatively miniscule amounts of tax per acre, are the heart of the tax base and the economy?

Nine years ago, approximately 250,167 acres out of 480,640 in Wayne County were leased by approximately 3,491 landowners out of approximately 40,886 landowners.

What did they do with all that money, and what impact did it have on the other approximately 91.5% of the Wayne County landowners?

Who is Rep. Fritz representing?

[James Barth is a resident of Beach Lake, PA.]

Section: OPINION

MY VIEWS

