



SPECIAL GUEST EDITORIAL

JUNE 28, 2010

A Call to Action for the Natural Gas Industry: Help Us Defend You



Mel LeBlanc, PhD
Arlington City Council, District 1

*"The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are filled with passionate intensity."*

The Second Coming
William Butler Yeats

Lest natural gas aficionados minimize Senator Wendy Davis' recent "call to action" in response to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's (TCEQ) alleged mishandling of air quality tests, I caution you to take notice. I do so as a quasi outsider to your industry, one who has a fiduciary interest in your success, yet no personal, financial dog in the hunt. I also do so as a patriot who values natural gas as a near-term antidote to dependence on foreign oil and its attendant baggage, and I do so finally as an individual concerned about our environment, convinced that natural gas is the best transition fuel to that elusive if not theoretical Ideal energy of the future. Clean-burning, plentiful, domestic, economic... natural gas is "lookin' real 'purdy" right now.

But complacency should be our enemy, because Senator Davis is correct: this *is* a call to action. It is a call to action because the response to TCEQ's mishap is an exemplar of how urban gas drilling is being derailed by the sophistry intrinsic to the environmental movement, an entity one would expect to embrace such a clean energy source. It is a call to action because unless Industry awakens from its deer-in-the-headlights paralysis, urban gas drilling could be DOA, in my opinion.

Permit me to explain. Although I am in no position to know what caused TCEQ to delay public pronouncement of a second round of air quality tests and results, I am more interested in the results than the bureaucratic snafu. If TCEQ has an internal problem with process, they need to fix it, whereas if results point to air pollution, we all have a challenge that must be rectified. Now, since even the more sensitive, second round of TCEQ testing demonstrated no air pollution, one must assume that Senator Davis' "call to action" stems from her abhorrence over some sort of process mumbo-jumbo, bureaucratic sleight of hand that's put a bee under the Senator's bonnet.

But no, Senator Davis deemed this situation worthy of a full-fledged call to action on its own merits, leveraging the opacity caused by organizational disarray and/or clerical errors to justify a we're-not-gonna-take-it-anymore posturing to hijack urban drilling. Senator Davis called for a moratorium on drilling months ago, even slumming with a

local City Council to request the rejection of a drilling case pending Council deliberation. The darling of DFW greenies, the Senator's actions are no doubt inspiring to local activists who have been flexing their muscles of late, with notable successes to show for it. Yours truly made a motion this past Tuesday to approve a Chesapeake drill site off Center Street in Arlington, which was defeated due to lack of a second, in effect an 8 to 1 pounding. The presentations of the anti-drillers focused on explosions and widespread air pollution, as well as the site's proximity to Cowboys stadium. The fact that none of the almost 15,000 drill sites in the Barnett Shale have blown up, that air tests indicate no air pollution problem, and that the drill site is almost a mile from, and invisible to, the stadium, have proven irrelevant.

A call to action is a rallying cry to all who care that their time has arrived, that the spoils of battle are ready to be taken. It is also a time, regretfully, when spin-meisters reign, truth is emasculated, and the Irrational gains a foothold in public discourse. Irrational thinking (dumb ideas, making policy based on emotion, hyperbole, Utopianism, etc.) becomes ubiquitous and accepted as truth, typically a last resort for most movements. In the case of urban drilling, opponents failed to make a viable economic case to support their argument, nor quite frankly did they articulate legitimate environmental concerns. Their only brush with truth was their ability to convince citizens that urban drilling can be an inconvenience for some and aggravating for others, basically a 3 to 5 week nuisance.

But it is via the political realm that local environmentalists have been able to masterfully elevate a matter of human inconvenience, to a matter of human life or death, and to convince otherwise clear-thinking individuals through misinformation, emotional diatribes, and pure sophistry, that "the true is false, and the false is true" [see Plato's "The Sophist"]. Armed with environmental law that emulates their own beliefs and agendas, they are willing to exercise their nascent power, confident in their moral superiority, emboldened both by current events and by their Commander in Chief himself.

Two meetings this past week exemplify my argument. Arlington's City Council meeting on Tuesday was rife with citizen rants on the pervasive air pollution being generated by urban gas drilling. My only retort was to resort to the facts: all air test results demonstrate no deleterious effect on human health; all Dish blood tests produced negative readings [with the exception of cigarette smokers who voluntarily ingest benzene]; round 2 of TCEQ tests also unveil trace levels of chemicals significantly below harmful thresholds, etc. The response from the leading attacker: "Well, your son wasn't born with a neurological disorder, so I'm sorry, I disagree." My inability to respond was excused by the applause of the audience that would have silenced my words anyway. In a public venue, such an emotionally laden statement not only destroys legitimate discourse, it further feeds into the frenzy of the irrational as evident in the applause.

Thursday's TCEQ meeting also held in Arlington was a human zoo with all but one speaker adamant enemies of urban drilling, denigrating the satanic gas drilling industry, demanding moratoriums while simultaneously chastising and mocking all TCEQ employees present. Many in the audience of well over 100 individuals carried paper gas masks that they held in front of their faces, coughing to drown-out anything said by TCEQ (see photos below). The cacophony was calmed when Mr. Ed Ireland of the Barnett Shale Energy Education Council spoke, encouraging the Commission to base policy on empirical data, in fact suggesting that more testing devices be employed to acquire even more data for review. Based on Mr. Ireland's statements, it would appear Industry has nothing to hide.

Other than an outright moratorium, the real danger of Thursday's meeting resides in cost. Input to TCEQ is overwhelmingly one-sided and slanted, and it focuses on regulation, restraints, and fines which could cripple urban drilling. Representative Lon Burnham's assistant read his letter that discussed 19 years of non-compliance with EPA air standards, thus the need to restrain urban drilling [see the connection?]; Anthony Spangler, Senator Davis' Chief of Staff, ignored public manners by taking almost 8 minutes of his 2½ minute time allotment to read a letter that calls for an Oil & Gas fund the Senator wants to establish, presumably to deal with testing and to enforce environmental justice [guess who pays for all of it with permit fees?]; many speakers insisted that TCEQ ignore "financial feasibility" as they

demanded that diesel engines be banned from drill sites in favor of an all-electric environment, and that all drill-sites, storage units, separation tanks, *et al*, be required to have vapor recovery devices.

If the above is not enough to awaken you to take notice, dear reader, consider a point mentioned earlier: there was only one voice of support for urban drilling at TCEQ's meeting, among a sea of opposition. So if you know the facts are being skewed, yet you're hanging your hat on "truth, justice, and the American way," you will lose. Hitler's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels' declaration that "if you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it" is alive and well in the Barnett Shale, I assure you.

I recently wondered if urban shale fracing, being merely a subset of the universe of natural gas drilling, is a sub-market the Industry is willing to forego in lieu of more rural and less contentious drill sites. If this is the case, so be it. However, if you see value in the urban market, you may want to heed an idea articulated by Mr. Will Brackett, Managing Editor of this newsletter. The lies and misinformation must be refuted wherever they appear, preferably by average citizens and not Industry. Thus, an Alliance of Mineral Lease Owners should be formed by citizens motivated to attend these meetings to publicly set the record straight.

I agree with Mr. Brackett, and I think that unless Industry vigorously counters this nonsense at the grass-roots level, urban gas drilling could already be a thing of the past. While Yeats' words are an appropriate epigraph to this article, you, "the best," are perhaps not "lack[ing] conviction," you may simply be asleep at the wheel.



Anti-drilling activists at the TCEQ meeting June 24, 2010. Photos courtesy of Mel LeBlanc.