

# Star-Telegram

## Money, jobs linked to Barnett Shale production matter - greatly

Posted Thursday, Oct. 13, 2011

**BY MEL LEBLANC**

Special to the Star-Telegram

The juxtaposition of back-to-back *Star-Telegram* opinion pieces last week encapsulates irony too seductive to let pass.

Mike Norman's suggestion in his Friday column (See: "Put the drilling dollars and jobs together and what does it add up to?") that urban drilling's contribution to North Texas represents "a staggering amount of money and jobs" that is "not relevant" and merely "nice to know" is curious indeed. However, it is the following day's editorial deification of the expansion of Arlington's General Motors plant, a facility important to my own city for which I am most grateful, that should give pause for concern regarding Norman's "yes-but" argument. (See: "Points worth noting")

The economic difference between drilling and automobile manufacturing is enormous: 100,268 drilling jobs vs. 2,633 direct and 14,500 indirect jobs from auto manufacturing; \$11.1 billion delivered to North Texas annually by drilling versus \$790 million to the annual gross state product by General Motors. Yet since Norman's admonishment against chasing dollars at the expense of quality of life and possible environmental toxicity is prudent, let's examine a couple of his concerns.

Arlington's General Motors plant emits 200 tons of volatile organic compounds into our atmosphere annually based on EPA Emissions Inventory data. The figure does not include emissions associated with employee commuting, nor truck and train delivery of 1,660 cars per day, nor the pending plant expansion.

As a comparison, aggregate emissions for all natural gas wells drilled in Arlington, assuming a complete build-out of an estimated 313 gas wells, is 17 tons per year.

While those numbers speak for themselves, most peculiar to note is that in my almost six years as an elected official in Arlington, not one resident has complained about auto manufacturing air emissions, though those emission values exceed drillers' by more than 10-fold.

Let's also examine the perceived contamination of our drinking water by citing yet another remarkable statistic: Of the approximately 1.2 million wells fracked in the United States since 1949, there has been no verified case of fracking contamination of a municipal water table.

To dispel accusations that I am hounding automakers, one printing company in Arlington emits almost twice the volume of volatile organics as citywide drilling at 30 tons per year, and a manufacturer of acrylic bath products approximates citywide drilling at 18 tons. Again, opposition has been mute. Furthermore, I genuinely applaud the reawakening of GM, having served as chairman of the Economic Development Committee recommending plant expansion incentives to our full council.

Yet natural gas drillers have not requested 10-year tax abatements or taxpayer-funded Troubled Asset Relief Program bailouts, nor have they been beaten into submission by foreign quality. Instead, the natural gas industry has provided Fort Worth-Arlington an opportunity to be the epicenter for urban mineral extraction, a model for our country to emulate, certainly an industry with great potential for our economic and national security future. All that is lacking is the political will to move forward.

So instead of shooting the messenger, in this case the Perryman Group, with insinuations of data-for-pay or implying that residents cannot withstand landman selling tactics, why not admit that legitimate science could be right or at least embrace the desires of a vast majority of North Texans?

In lieu of questioning the validity of every empirical study that attests to the viability of the golden goose in our midst, why not demand of our presidential candidates a Kennedyesque 10-year thrust for energy independence using natural gas as our vehicle? All variables are in place for it to happen: a low-cost, plentiful, clean-burning commodity.

Opportunities in life come and go, and leadership in urban drilling is ours for the taking.

Mel LeBlanc represents District 1 on the Arlington City Council.

[melleb@sbcglobal.net](mailto:melleb@sbcglobal.net)

[Looking for comments?](#)