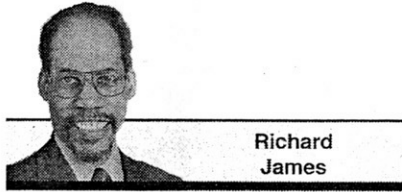


# Gas drilling fever: Get ready for the new influx

On July 29th this newspaper, the Lock Haven Express, the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association, and the Pennsylvania Cable Network held a televised town meeting at the Community Theatre League in downtown Williamsport to present the pro and cons of gas drilling in central Pennsylvania.

To be sure, there were plenty of technical and legal terms tossed about by the six paneled experts but most of the program was clear enough for the average person to comprehend. The topics ranged from environmental impact concerns to road maintenance to contractual commitments in the leasing process. While the presentation was very informative and upbeat – an estimated 50 billion dollars injected into Central Pennsylvania's sagging economy over the next 40 years is a good thing – the negative side was barely discussed. How will gas drilling affect our quality of life?

Dr. Timothy Kelsey from Penn State's Agricultural Sciences



Richard James

Department said that local and state officials must be prepared for an army of "transient young white males" coming into our towns and cities. This group is associated with high crimes rates that would include petty larceny, violent assaults, illegal drug use and prostitution. The panelists and the moderator laughed at the idea of young white males "sowing their oats" in our community. After all, boys will be boys.

A boomtown mentality will descend on our area. This will draw less-than-desirable individuals from other areas of the country. The lure of the region's prosperity will be a magnet for every hustler, thief and drug pusher from Maine to California. I can envision new strip clubs and casinos being built on nearby farmland. I see the "ladies

of the night" walking our streets and boldly selling their craft.

I also see future corruption in government. Backroom deals will be cut to favor a select few. Temptation to take bribes from multi-billion dollar companies will be overwhelming. Future scandals of local, state and federal officials will rock our communities.

The scenario reminds me of Hollywood's Old West mythology of the cattle drive cowboys. After a hard day's work, they come into town for a little fun and relaxation. Young and unpredictable, the cattlemen would invariably get into brawls in the saloon and have a gratuitous gunfight with the sheriff at the end of the movie.

Sorry, I am being an alarmist. None of that kind of craziness is going to happen in Williamsport. Right? Our current civic and governmental leaders will take the proper steps to insure the future safety and well being of the community. Laws will be passed to keep our quality of life intact. Budgets for the police will increase. The public will be aware of the prob-

lems and be active partners in protecting our communities.

Pushing the specter of crime aside for a moment, there is another problem looming on the horizon. Let's say you own a small business. Hector, your best worker, resigns to take a job with a drilling company. The drilling company pays more per hour and has an excellent benefits package. Soon, you are scrambling to find good workers. You are forced to raise salaries to compete with large drilling companies. You pass the costs to the consumer in the form of higher prices. But, no one will care because everybody will be making more money. The local economy will suffer from above average inflation. There could be a labor shortage.

In other words, get ready for the next influx of outsiders. And this time, they will be sanctioned and supported by a powerful industry searching for energy in an energy-starved world. What we do today will affect our quality of life tomorrow.

Let's hope that our leaders will make the right decisions and guide

us into a bright and prosperous future. And secondly, let's all keep a watchful eye on the unfolding chain of events that will determine the shape of things to come. While experiencing the prosperity that gas drilling offers, we must also be responsible stewards of our natural and social environments.

As the televised meeting ended, I wondered about the profile of the gas drillers. They were described as "transient young white males". What percentage of these men will be immigrants? How many are Hispanic? Or African-American? How would the community receive them? Would the race of the drillers make a difference? Then I asked, "Are these highly paid skilled labor jobs dominated solely by young white males? If so, why?" Will minorities be locked out of these jobs?

Yep, we have a lot work to do. The new influx is coming.

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