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ENERGY GUEST BLOG -- JIM SAMUEL

Guest blog - Jim Samuel: Ohio has strictest water regulation framework

JIM SAMUEL



Jim Samuel is founder and principal of Capitol Integrity Group, a fellow of the Levin College at Cleveland State University and a founding partner of the Ohio Shale Consortium. He has worked extensively in the economic development and public policy arenas and serves as a consultant to the energy industry.

By **JIM SAMUEL**
4:30 am, June 19, 2012

It's a great time of year. For the past two weeks I have been absorbed in neighborhood and church festivals, high school and college graduation parties, and a small family reunion. Among the typical talk of kids' activities, summer plans and the occasional smart phone slideshow of family pictures, I noticed a topic of conversation has been added this year: People are talking and asking questions about shale.

I have been immersed in and speaking around the state on the behind-the-scenes issues of tax policy, regulations and economic impact on both the state and region, so I found it both interesting and exciting that people far removed from the energy sector are aware of and intrigued by shale energy and want to know more.

People are asking real questions that, at the end of the day, are the ones that matter. Whether it's my uncle, a neighbor or the guy slogging through a two-hour volunteer shift alongside me, these are the questions of Ohio's constituency, Ohio's labor force and Ohio's families.

"When is it going to take off?" "How do I get a job?" And most importantly, "Is it safe for our water?"

It is a great reminder that government, industry and environmental community leaders must get out of the bubble that encapsulates the statehouse and other hyper-partisan settings and listen to the questions posed by people at backyard barbecues, festivals and graduation parties. Genuinely interested and hopeful in the opportunity of Ohio's shale reserves -- with concern for water quality and prudent environmental protections -- people deserve facts and productive action.

For instance, let's look at concerns about water. The recently passed [Substitute Senate Bill 315](#) gives Ohio regulators added authority creating the strictest regulatory framework in the country.

Ohio has the nation's first combined well construction and hydraulic fracturing chemical disclosure requirements. New pre-drilling, well water sampling is required with the results disclosed in publicly available permit applications. And all sources of water to be used in the drilling and hydraulic fracturing process must also be publicly disclosed in advance.

On the disposal side, new requirements give regulators tools to better track and monitor brine haulers, and injection well owners must electronically transmit information about every shipment. New fines have been imposed and liability insurance for shale wells in rural areas was increased 500%.

Drowned out by the loudest voices inside the bubble, people might never hear facts like these.

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Let's also remember the technology to harvest the energy from shale continues to advance at a rapid pace. It takes millions of gallons of water to produce a well, but one of the largest drillers in Pennsylvania, where the industry is several years ahead of Ohio, recently reported it recycles 96% of its flowback water for reuse in the next well. There are also new treatment processes that can return flowback water to clean, potable water.

Earlier this year, at the City Club of Cleveland, U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said, "Hydraulic fracking can be done safely and in fact is being done safely in most cases."

Is the process perfect? No. But, every choice we make comes with some risk and some reward. The bottom line is those in leadership need to step out of their bubbles, have conversations with real people, and focus their efforts on data and facts, not hyperbole. Doing so will restore proper perspective, away from the tunnel vision of political and special interests created inside the bubble, and toward the concerns, hopes and wishes of Ohio citizens.

This past weekend the state capitol was again besieged by the extremes of both sides. One Statehouse protest rally cry demanded that Ohio follow Vermont's lead and impose a total ban on fracking. That's like saying Ohio follow Montana's lead and ban shark finning. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Vermont produces no natural gas and has no measurable reserves, yet it consumes 8.5 billion cubic feet of natural gas annually.

Interestingly, three-quarters of all the electricity produced in Vermont comes from nuclear power, the highest of any state. I wonder how they will respond when some groups suggests Vermont should follow Australia's lead with a near complete ban on nuclear power?

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