

NOVEMBER 2015

Protect Our Parks to Oppose Accreditation of the Allegheny County Health Department

PITTSBURGH: *Protect Our Parks*, which has fought against leasing of county land for fracking, will oppose the application of the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) for national accreditation. In a letter to ACHD's Director, Dr. Karen Hacker and the Board of Health, *Protect Our Parks* described the department as "... unable to function effectively in the political environment in which it exists."

Dr. Hacker was appointed to her position by County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, after Mr. Fitzgerald had forced the removal of her predecessor, long-time Director Bruce Dixon. (Dr. Dixon died while pursuing a lawsuit over his dismissal.) Since coming to ACHD, Dr. Hacker has adopted the accreditation process as a framework for establishing her department's priorities.

The Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), to which the county department is applying, publishes "Standards and Measures" for evaluating a public health department. Expectations include "to contain and mitigate" environmental health risks, "enforcement" of local health regulations (including environmental controls), and managing "engagement" with the governing entity — meaning, in our case the



Horizontal drilling has begun at Deer Lakes Park, where Allegheny County leased nearly 1200 acres of public land for fracking.

County Executive and Council.

In voicing its objections, *Protect Our Parks* points to ACHD's recent "Public Health Assessment" (the first step in seeking accreditation), and its disregard for public concerns and scientific research on fracking as a risk to health. Such skewing of priorities occurs in a context where drilling interests have undue political influence and the county itself is signing leases for fracking.

As it did when arguing for frack-free county parks, *Protect Our Parks* raises the question, "How can we expect the county to protect us from the fracking business, if the county is in the fracking business?"

Telling the Truth: Duquesne University's 'Integrity of Creation'

PITTSBURGH: In early October, I joined the Thomas Merton Center's table for a three-day meeting on the climate crisis, organized by Duquesne University. At the end of the conference, I had to give Duquesne credit for a "nice try," but I was ultimately disappointed by its failure to make the most of a unique opportunity.

President Charles Dougherty led off with

a reflection on the founding principles of the university as a Catholic institution.

Specifically, he said, the university's establishment was sponsored by the Spiritan Congregation, whose tradition calls for "Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation" (from which this conference had taken its name). Drawing from Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Dr. Daugherty emphasized that the con-

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Entering the End-Game? Now it gets rough

HARRISBURG: So, Range Resources has gone into the red, and investors are "fleeing" master limited partnerships (MLPs), the shale gas industry's favorite vehicle for replenishing capital. Shall we cheer the coming end-game for frackers?

Back when wars still did come to an end, military analysts discovered that casualty rates rose toward the end of a war, even when combatants must have realized that their further sacrifices would be in vain.

Perhaps officers stopped trying to spare their troops for future battles, or each side was desperate to create 'facts on the ground' before a final ceasefire. For whatever reasons, wars turned especially bloody near their end.

Similarly, in the gas industry today, some behaviors seem out of touch with self-preservation. Many actions undermine whatever claims drillers might have made for being "good neighbors."

The frantic extraction of gas at money-losing prices; lawsuits to punish public speech; use of *eminent domain* to rush the advance of pipelines; disdain for the safety of workers and the public — all those scorched-earth tactics resemble the final thrashings of a defeated army.

In an even broader view, we see fracking itself as a desperation strategy in the waning days of our fossil-fuel economy. No one wants to be first to leave the field, not as long as the action hasn't stopped.

At the five-year anniversary of Marcellus Protest, and Pittsburgh's ban on fracking, we can see that the balance has swung. But we should still expect some rough times before fracking's ultimate defeat.

Marcellus Protest is a project of the Thomas Merton Center (Pittsburgh, PA): www.thomasmertoncenter.org

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ference was intended to consider climate change from a moral perspective — in particular, regarding its impact on “the most vulnerable” — and not merely as a physical or even a political phenomenon. Unfortunately, it was on this very dimension that the conference would fall short.

The keynote address was given by Dr. Richard Alley, Professor of Environmental Science at Penn State University. [All the presentations may be seen online at duq.edu/ioc.]

Dr. Alley has presented to many prestigious audiences, in and out of government, and is a charismatic and persuasive speaker. Despite the obvious risk of “preaching to the choir,” he gave a powerful overview of the physical phenomena of climate change, its inexorable dynamics, and the already visible signs of its pending impact. He concluded, “We already have one degree [1°C of global warming] and we’re committed to the second [i.e., 2°C, the consensus upper limit for what might be tolerable]. We’re arguing now about three, four and five.”

He pointed out that “Those who contribute the least greenhouse gases will be the most impacted by climate change,” invoking Pope Francis (as well as the Golden Rule) to draw the relevant moral inference. But, despite the radical implications of his data, he ended back inside the market-driven, techno-centric comfort zone: Converting to a renewable energy infrastructure is technically feasible, he said. And it can generate jobs and contribute to economic growth in the process.

So it fell to Dr. Laurie Zoloth, Professor of Religious Studies at Northwestern, to draw from the power of a faith perspective in her presentation the next day. Although based in the Jewish tradition, she joined Pope Francis in declaring that the marketplace is not the ultimate arbiter of human decisions, nor the ground of significance for a human life. Not presuming that it is within our power to undo what has been done, she didn’t

propose a green energy policy. Instead, calling for a “Risky Hospitality” toward those who are already, now, being devastated by climate change — the Middle Eastern and other climate refugees, among others—she challenged us to decide how we would live in the future that is coming upon us.

Later, I spoke with one attendee about his conversation with Dr. Alley, away from the platform. Both of them conceded that any “3, 4 or 5 degree” scenario is catastrophic, involving the total loss of America’s coastal cities and the state of Florida, among other consequences. Dr. Alley

even admitted his own sense of despair over any timely action being taken against the climate crisis: “We’re trading decades for millenia.” So why, he was asked, was he not more forthright in public? “You can’t say that on The [Capitol] Hill,” he replied.

Other presenters were similarly restrained, and the discussion at our table (and other tables, from what we overheard) was considerably more candid than the on-the-record presentations.

As we’ve found in meetings on fracking, our culture rejects any challenging information that doesn’t come packaged with a market-driven remedy. “If fracking is really that harmful, then how will you meet our energy demands?” One could hope that climate conversations in a religious institution might surmount such limitations, and that’s where I was disappointed.

I left the conference more convinced than ever that (1) as a human community, we won’t get anywhere until we are telling the truth to each other, and (2) our institutions won’t take the lead in telling the truth. Those institutions work to maintain the context for which they were created, and in which they have evolved. Our future will come from real people, a few at a time, talking to each other, speaking over the noise that will always be coming at us from institutions and their mass media.

John Detwiler

***“During times of universal deceit,
telling the truth becomes a
revolutionary act.”***

generally attributed to George Orwell

A Range of Resources

Please check out our ‘Resources’ page at www.marcellusprotest.org/resources, and follow us on Facebook (at [Marcellus Protest](https://www.facebook.com/MarcellusProtest)) and Twitter ([@Marcellus_SWPA](https://twitter.com/Marcellus_SWPA)). Here is a sample from our recent recommendations:

Third Edition, “[Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings](#), Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking”, published by Concerned Health Professionals of NY and the Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Upcoming Events in November:

November 9, Thomas Merton Award Dinner (Sheraton Station Square, Pittsburgh) 6:00pm. The [Thomas Merton Center](#) is the fiduciary sponsor for Marcellus Protest. The 43rd annual Thomas Merton Award will be presented to California Congresswoman Barbara Lee (who cast the only vote against the Congressional ‘use of force’ approval in September, 2001).

November 18, Shale & Public Health Conference (University Club, 123 University Place, Pittsburgh-Oakland) 8:30am. The third annual all-day conference, sponsored by the [League of Women Voters](#) of Pennsylvania. Suitable for professional continuing education as well as the general public. Attendance is free (\$14 to sign-up for lunch.)

Updated information on these topics (with links to original sources), along with our calendar of upcoming events, and other resources, can be found at www.marcellusprotest.org.