



DUPONT SUMMIT 2013

..... Pressing Issues, Economic Realities

The Policy Studies Organization

Speakers

Kristen Obst - *American Public University System*

Molly Whitworth - *American Public University System*

" Fracking in North Carolina: a Case study in Civic Engagement"

Before 2012, hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” the process used to extract natural gas from shale, was not permitted in North Carolina. The moratorium was lifted accidentally after four heated public discussions, a vote, and a veto, and exploration in the state is now permitted. This proposal is a case study of the ongoing civic dialogue addressing the change in legislation. We will examine the intersection and collision between civic engagement, state and local government, and business enterprise. All three parties bring investment and opportunity to North Carolina, and all are stakeholders in the environment. This paper and presentation will examine the unique confluence of military and academics that make up basin communities where the shale and gas are located, the impact of a changing administration, the political structure of the state, and the impact of the economic downturn on the dialogue.

Prior to July 2012, there was a moratorium on exploration for natural gas. In order to change the legislation, the issue was opened to public debate. Initially two sessions were held, but the topic was so heated that two more were scheduled by the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR), and several more were held by private groups and local communities on both sides of the issue from October 2011- April 2012. The issue passed the House, but was vetoed by the Democratic Governor. On July 3, 2012 the veto went to a vote, and the deciding vote was cast by Rep. Becky Carney an opponent of fracking who claims she hit the wrong button and inadvertently voted with Republicans to overturn Democratic Governor Bev Perdue’s veto of the original measure, Session Law 2011-276.



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Despite high levels of civic engagement, the ultimate decision was made by an elected official who hit the wrong button. The state was divided and seemed to be weighing options based on economic need (ROI) and impact on local environment (mostly water quality issues, although outside groups had raised concerns about climate change through methane release). Civic participation has deflated significantly since this veto was overturned, and most dialogue seems to be left to organized groups, some of whom are from NC, some of whom represent other larger climate change organizations. Subsequent discussions impact landholders and local communities significantly, and their involvement is either forced, as in pooling for lease rights, (Murawski, 2013) or eliminated, as in cancelled water quality tests (Henderson, 2013).

North Carolina currently has some of the strictest water quality testing standards, but the Mining and Energy Commission, created under the 2012 law allowing exploration for fracking, has urged lawmakers to ease these restrictions saying they are overly restrictive. Most recently, Gov. Pat McCrory (R) returned federal EPA grant money to conduct baseline water quality tests (recommended by NCDENR in 2013), also returned federal grant for wetlands monitoring. The McCrory administration is reorganizing the Department of Natural Resources and was eliminating the division that was supposed to receive the grants (Water Quality) and argues that "environmental regulations kill jobs" (Henderson, 2013). North Carolina can pursue natural gas exploration under statute without these tests.

This discussion will examine the science behind what we know so far behind water quality and fracking, and examine how communities can and have been engaged in the process. Can North Carolina safely reduce their testing standards and proceed with exploration? Are citizens misinformed by documentaries about flaming water, or has access to information and a mobilized and organized population impacted state regulation and mining and fracking in NC? This case study will address the intersection and collision between an informed public, two administrations of opposing political parties, and businesses interested in entering the natural gas market in North Carolina.



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Biographies

Kristen Obst is an Associate Professor and the Program Director for the Public Administration and Security Management Programs at American Public University System (APUS). She received her BA in Sociology from Swarthmore College in 1997, and her MA and PhD in Urban Affairs and Public Policy from the University of Delaware (2001 and 2006). Her dissertation was on how cities and urban events are represented in editorial cartoons, one of our nation's proudest legacies of political commentary. She has taught Sociology, Political Science, Public Policy, and Statistics both online and in the traditional classroom at the University of Delaware, Delaware Technical and Community College, and Goldey-Beacom College. She currently teaches graduate level Public Policy and Public Administration for APUS. Most of her recent publications are about balancing education with military family life, and she continues to blog about public administration and public policy issues. She is married to a member of the US Army and lives near Fort Bragg, NC.

Dr Whitworth received her Sc.M. and PhD from The Johns Hopkins University's School of Public Health. She served in EPA's Office of Research and Development as the Water Media Manager and nationally recognized scientific expert on biological and toxicological environmental issues managed under the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. From 1988 through 1999 she was a senior staff ecologist in EPA's Office of Policy. Currently Dr Whitworth teaches environmental science courses at several Universities.