Impact fee shortchanges taxpayers

Rising natural gas prices have demonstrated yet again the degree to which Pennsylvania lawmakers serve the natural gas industry rather than Pennsylvanians.

Due to majority legislators’ fidelity to the industry, Pennsylvania is the only gas-producing state that does not have a severance tax on natural gas production.

Indeed, these legislators concocted a “local impact fee.” As demonstrated by a new report from the Independent Fiscal Office, that fee is a gift to the gas industry, at the expense of millions of workers. Legislators should respond.

The impact fee on natural gas production—Pennsylvania’s fee is variable based on the market price for natural gas—has seen a massive discount based on the age of each production facility. Coupled with production increases, the high prices drove the value of Pennsylvania shale gas extracted in 2021 to about $17.8 billion, or about $87.6 million more than in 2020. An economic recovery and increase in natural gas prices more than doubled from 2020 prices. Coupled with production increases, the higher price drove the value of Pennsylvania shale gas extracted in 2021 to about $17.8 billion, or about $87.6 million more than in 2020.

But because the local impact fee serves the industry, Pennsylvania is the only gas-producing state that does not have a “severance” tax on natural gas production.

The IFO’s report estimates that impact fee revenue rebounded in 2021 from 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced many down due to low gas prices. Collections totaled about $233.8 million in 2021, compared to about $156 million in 2020.

But the impact fee is small, a $200 million from the federal relief funds used to help millions of workers. Legislators should respond.

The pandemic continues to pose huge challenges for the health care industry and frontline workers.

Help retain nursing staffs

Pennsylvania faced a significant nursing shortage even before the pandemic tore through long-term care facilities and overwhelmed hospitals. The pandemic forced the government to project a shortage of 30% by 2025.

The pandemic clearly has accelerated the problem. In the past year, Pennsylvania’s Department of Health and Human Services approved a new $5 million loan forgiveness program as an incentive for nurses to continue working, but 4,800 nurses already have applied.

More than 1.5 million Pennsylvanians use personal emergency response systems — which can be called the “Plan Ahead for Health” of Pennsylvania’s Department of Health. The technology transition could leave lower-income seniors and older Pennsylvanians disconnected as they may lose easy access to critical services, including the ability to call 911. Moreover, adults using personal emergency response systems — which are bands worn on the wrist or neck — are at risk. That, when activated, notified first responders of an emergency should determine if their devices work as 9G networks or traditional 911 systems. The technology transition could leave lower-income seniors and older Pennsylvanians disconnected as they may lose easy access to critical services, including the ability to call 911. Moreover, adults using personal emergency response systems — which are bands worn on the wrist or neck — are at risk. That, when activated, notified first responders of an emergency should determine if their devices work as 9G networks or traditional 911 systems.

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