Ohio Senate Approves Horizontal Drilling Rules

JULIE CARR SMYTH, Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Ohio senators approved new regulations for horizontal shale drilling on Tuesday in a bipartisan vote punctuated by a spoken rendition of "The Beverly Hillbillies" theme song.

State Sen. Bill Seitz, a Cincinnati Republican, used the 1960s sitcom's protagonist — who became an instant millionaire when he discovered oil — to urge fellow lawmakers to dispense with critics of hydraulic fracturing and get drilling moving in the state.

"Folks, we're sitting on a mountain of money," he said. "People who have been poor as church mice for 150 years are now going to be the latter-day Jed Clampetts."

The detailed energy bill cleared the chamber, 27-6, with backing from both Republicans and Democrats. It also adjusts Ohio's renewable energy standard, which set a timetable for utilities to meet usage thresholds, to include waste heat such as that generated from factory smokestacks.

Supporters said the bill balances environment, public health and safety, and commerce by expanding chemical disclosure and water testing requirements. It goes next to the Ohio House.

Gov. John Kasich said the bill ensures that "Ohio approaches energy production and consumption in a safe and responsible way, while also giving families and job creators access to more affordable energy."

The bill requires well operators to disclose the location they'll draw water from for blasting into the well to release oil, natural gas and natural gas liquids, as well as the rate and volume at which they'll withdraw it.

The legislation also requires well operators to disclose all chemicals that will come into contact with human water supplies during the drilling operation, though not the specific recipe. Water samples must also be taken at all wells within 1,500 feet of any proposed horizontal well.

No Frack Ohio, a coalition of anti-drilling groups, said such provisions won't help the public because reports won't be timely or specific enough. They said the bill was written by the oil and gas industry and benefits them at the expense of Ohio residents.

"The chemical disclosure requirements in this bill are meaningless, as the industry is only required to give a yearly report," Cheryl Johncox of Buckeye Forest Council said in a statement. "How can a citizen establish baseline water testing when they don't know what chemicals to test for?"

Johncox also criticized a provision that prevents doctors from sharing concerns about patients' exposure to chemicals with local health departments or first responders.

Republican Senate President Tom Niehaus took the rare step of leaving his official perch Tuesday to praise the bill. He said it protects the environment, public safety and health while encouraging a growing industry — going further even than Colorado's "gold standard" drilling rules.

"We do things that Colorado hadn't even contemplated," Niehaus said.

Critics said the bill ignores disposal of wastewater from hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, that has become an environmental issue in eastern Ohio. Disposal of the millions of gallons of chemical-laced water used in the fracking process in a deep-injection well has been tied to a series of earthquakes in the Youngstown area.

Sen. Shannon Jones, the bill's sponsor, said wastewater regulations would be addressed in separate legislation.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/17/2014 - 9:09am*):
http://www.chem.info/news/2012/05/ohio-senate-approves-horizontal-drilling-rules?qt-most_popular=0