

Seven Questions for the Mayor of DISH

In advance of Mayor Tillman's trip to New York next week, EID poses a series of questions residents should ask while he's there

It's not every day you're likely to run into the [mayor of a small town](#) in Denton Co., Texas ambling about the Southern Tier of New York State. But next week, that's precisely where you'll find DISH mayor Calvin Tillman – slated to make the nearly 1,500-mile trip to the Empire State to rally [local environmental activists](#) against efforts to explore for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale.

Now, wait a second: Isn't this the same Marcellus Shale that [studies suggest](#) could create 16,000 high-wage jobs in Broome Co., N. Y. **alone** -- and generate \$15.3 billion in local economic development? Yep, that's the one. Turns out, though, that the mayor of DISH isn't as sanguine on shale gas as you'd expect. And to help him punctuate his case, he'll be bringing to New York a couple of recent "[studies](#)" on the subject aimed at scaring local residents into believing that natural gas exploration will ruin their air, sully their land, and poison their water. Should be quite the show.

Of course, we can't say for certain whether the mayor will mention to local residents that these studies have been [almost universally panned](#) by independent environmental engineers; that they were recently debunked by the [Texas Commission on Environmental Quality](#) (TCEQ) itself; or that the [contractor](#) who did the study for Mayor Tillman doesn't have a licensed professional engineer on its staff.

And who knows? He may forget to mention his relationship with the [Oil & Gas Accountability Project](#) (OGAP), an anti-energy group based in Colorado (but active in New York) which considers clean-burning natural gas a "[filthy](#)" form of energy. He may not find it relevant to mention that OGAP [funded](#) one of the studies he plans to show off – or that his town's official government website [links to OGAP's page](#) on the internet. Who can say for sure?

Thankfully, on the off-chance the mayor forgets to mention any of these details to the audiences he plans to visit – or that reporters forget to ask – [Energy In Depth](#) has assembled the following list of questions that Mayor Tillman might like to answer during his stay in New York:

And the Mayor's answers

Jeff and Chris,

I thank you for your interest in the happenings in the town of DISH, TX. I would like answer the questions that you have posed below, and would also like to personally invite you to DISH, TX, for a guided tour. I have outlined your seven questions and my answers will appear in bold after the questions. However, I must first start with your opening comments which contains several inaccurate statements.

First and foremost there has been no "debunking" of the air study performed here in DISH, at least not by anyone who is not getting a check from one of the energy companies. Furthermore, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has validated the findings here in and DISH, and went as far as to write an internal memo highlighting the health effects from this study, showing their concerns for the levels detected. The TCEQ has performed additional air studies in DISH and oddly enough found benzene at elevated levels.

The second item is your assertion that I do not see the positive effects of the shale plays. Just a couple of years ago the Barnett Shale added 10 billion dollars and 100,000 jobs to the economy for the State of Texas. That is an impact that no one can ignore, and I state this in every presentation that is given on the subject by me. I do not wish to see people lose their jobs, or the owners of the mineral lose their royalty checks. Why can we not make this a win-win situation? What if we could have that economic impact and

those jobs, and do it more responsibly and respectfully than we are doing it? Do we have to trade our air quality, water quality and property rights for this economic gain? The answer is no...we do not.

The next item is that you expect me to back away from my relationship with the Oil and Gas Accountability Project (OGAP). The things that OGAP stands for, and are trying to help reform are: surface owners rights, water quality, and air quality. For some reason I don't find it too repulsive that someone is trying to keep our water safe to drink, our air safe to breath, and give surface owners in a split estate a little more say so in what happens on their land that they worked hard to purchase. The industry may not like them, because they have had some success getting reasonable regulation in other states. I have not heard of the "filthy form of energy" comment; however; it is clear that the cleanest burning hydrocarbon does not come out of the ground that way. It has to go through a processing facility to remove the liquid hydrocarbons and other impurities. Unfortunately in Texas those contaminants are irresponsibly dumped into the environment. Could you please provide me with a copy of the article the quote was used in? I suspect this might be a story that keeps getting bigger as it passed down through the industry extremists.

1) Mr. Mayor, your assertion that local natural gas exploration activities have adversely impacted the air quality of your town appears to be entirely founded on a study you commissioned by a group called Wolf Eagle Environmental. Are you aware that TCEQ conducted an internal review of this study and found that "it is not possible" to draw the types of conclusions that appear in that report?

This statement is completely false. The TCEQ has never publicly said anything even remotely close to this, and any internal review only validated the findings. I will have copies of the internal reviews with me in New York (NY) and will happily provide a copy to you personally should you wish. The TCEQ has done many things to discredit themselves, but even they would not make the above statement.

2) Mr. Mayor, are you aware that Wolf Eagle Environmental was formerly known as Wolf Eagle Environmental Engineers & Consultants – but was forced to change its name upon it becoming public that the organization did not (and, in fact, still does not) employ an actual licensed professional engineer on staff?

This matter has been brought up by several industry extremists, who are looking to personally attack a very knowledgeable and credible person. The president of Wolf Eagle has a PhD in Environmental and Civil Engineering, in addition to a Masters in Public Health. She is also far more nationally recognized as an environmental expert than anyone who works for TCEQ, or the oil and gas industry. She is commonly asked to serve on national committees, and came highly recommended from several others who had PhD in their title. The environmental expert for one of the energy companies, isn't even smart enough to send an email, so we are way ahead of them. I think the industry has tried to vilify her, because she does not work for them, and her studies are honest and valid, and the common person trusts her. Therefore, she poses a threat to the hap-hazard way they are doing business in Texas. Plain and simple, she works for the little guy, the Davids who are facing Goliaths, and the industry views anyone who would help the underdog get justice, as a threat.

3) Mr. Mayor, is it true that once the Wolf Eagle evaluation was debunked, you accepted an offer from the national Oil & Gas Accountability Project (OGAP) to fund a second study of a similar type? Is it true that OGAP links are found on your town website? Are you aware that OGAP considers clean-burning natural gas a "filthy" energy source, and was in fact established as a means to fight natural gas exploration wherever, whenever and however it takes place?

Again the Wolf-Eagle air study was not debunked, but rather it was validated through several other studies. Unless you consider the attack from the Railroad Commission of Texas Chairman Victor Carrillo, a real sharp cookie I might add :), who was ready to blame all of our air problems on a tiny airport that stores more high end motor homes than it does airplanes, and houses

nothing that would cause the 16 toxins found in DISH. However, the sixteen toxins found here are typically found in oil and gas operations. Maybe he and you should do a little more research before you make fools out of yourselves. However, the real question is regarding my relationship with OGAP, which I will not back away from. A true national hero and MacArthur award winner helped us perform a health assessment on the citizens of DISH, which showed some cause for concern. However, she does this for many small communities around the country; again a genius and a hero. There are several links on the town's website to help folks gather information on oil and gas issues including OGAP. Not sure why this would be a concern to you, most cities have similar links on their websites as well, if your company was a legitimate source of this information, we might add you as well, but you have a ways to go before you become legitimate. From the statement above, please provide me a source of the tall tale "filthy energy" comment.

4) Mr. Mayor, have you had the chance to take a look at TCEQ's recent air quality study of the areas in and around the Barnett Shale? If so, did you note that of the 94 sites tested by TCEQ, 92 registered short-term effects screening levels (ESL) well below anything that would cause "alarm," according to TCEQ's toxicology director? Are you also aware that repairs at the remaining two sites tested by TCEQ have already been completed and certified by the agency?

As a matter of fact I printed the entire 313 page report and have been going through it page by page. Unfortunately, my schedule has not allowed me to complete my report on the document, but I will provide it to you upon completion. If you actually read the document (which I am certain you have not) you will see that the "94 sites", are counting each individual sample that was taken. Some may have been upwind, while others were downwind, and so forth. Therefore, each facility may have had numerous samples taken. Actually, there were only 44 separate facilities tested and half of those had benzene levels that were above the long term effects screening levels, not to mention the many other harmful toxins that were detected. There have also been reports that these facilities were only producing a third of their potential output, and even in TX, the weather is mild in October and November, so this study is in no way the worse case scenario. Wait till you see the numbers from July or August, they will be much worse. However, if the average person read the entire 313 page report, even though it is likely lower than reality, they would be shocked and realize there is an immediate danger in this area. I will bring the document with me to NY to show anyone who has questions about it.

5) Mr. Mayor, you testified on numerous occasions that energy operators in your area are responsible for the emission of benzene and other potential contaminants into the air. But did you know that the mere act of filling up your tank with a conventional gas pump (one without a vapor recovery device) could expose you to benzene levels of 11,000 parts per billion (ppb), according to TCEQ -- without any ambient air to dilute it? Are you aware that not even the Wolf Eagle study was able to find a single site in your area exceeding 78 ppb?

It is nice that you recognize the fact that we had some pretty high levels of benzene detected around the natural gas compressor stations. If you are suggesting that the levels detected in DISH do not pose a health risk, I am afraid that you are horribly mistaken, and there is no expert that would agree with that, even the industry extremists wouldn't make that stretch. I am not sure about the exposure levels of filling up my car with gas. However, as you mentioned there are vapor recovery devices to help minimize the exposure, and I would like to see that same vapor recovery technology used on emission sources in the oil and gas industry. I am glad you have highlighted the importance of vapor recovery and hope your suggestion helps in making that technology mandatory. This technology actually saves both money and this precious resource, and cuts up to 95% of the emissions produced by these sites. Why don't we use this simple and effective technology? Please note that the benzene levels are constant here, not just once for two minutes every couple of weeks, it is here 24/7. Also, the long term effects screening level for benzene is 1.4 ppbv, and therefore we detected over 50 times that level on residential properties where children reside. Would you want your children exposed to this 24/7?

6) Mr. Mayor, are you aware that according to EPA, "oil and natural gas production contributes only 2% of the total benzene emissions in the U.S., and shale gas represents a very small subset of this 2%"?

I have heard similar statements before, and do not wish to dispute this, because I am sure that other industries also pollute their neighborhoods. Unfortunately, for the citizens of DISH, part of that 2% is right here. It does however appear that this is one of those statistics that was carefully extracted from a larger report. Have you by chance read the report that this was extracted from? Please provide me with this report, and know that it may be changing because the EPA has been to DISH a couple of times.

7) Mr. Mayor, did you know that energy exploration is responsible for directly employing more than 200,000 people in your state? Accounts for the payment of more than \$44 million in royalties and rents to landowners every year? And sends more than \$4 billion each year to your treasury, representing nearly seven percent of your entire budget? Here in Upstate New York, we aren't trying to be the next Texas – but can you understand how the availability of even a fraction of these new resources could help revive and strengthen our economy?

Yes, I am well aware of the economic impact that the Barnett Shale has had in TX. Actually, as I have stated the numbers you are quoting are a low estimation. However, I consistently give the industry credit in that area, and do not wish to see people or the state lose those jobs. Frankly, there are many who work in this industry that I personally like. However, we can do this better than the way they are doing it in TX. If NY can get ahead of this, and get reasonable regulations in place, there is a possibility that you can get the great economic impact without destroying the land, air and water in the process. I am not going to NY to talk anyone out of drilling, but rather to inform them of what has happened here and give them some ideas as they move forward. Hopefully, they will make the decision knowing the whole story, not the industry version of the "gold rush". My goal is to let them make the decision with their eyes wide open, not eyes wide shut. What happened here does not have to happen in NY. You could get a win-win situation, let's give it a try anyway.

I hope that this helps you in answering many of the questions you have posed. If not I could further clarify. And although I do not use words like sanguine, my knowledge level on shale gas far outweighs most of those who work in the industry, including yourself. It certainly appears that rather than perform valid research, you are simply regurgitating the personal attacks that I have become accustomed to from this industry. I truly hope that when the benzene clears, that we will all be better off for this. I hope that the people of NY can reach the full benefits of the Marcellus Shale without the extreme side effects. I also hope that these simple measures will be mandated in Texas as well. It can be done; however, this industry must quit stating what good neighbors they are and start acting it

Calvin Tillman
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"Those who say it cannot be done, should get out of the way of those that are doing it"