

## 10.2.23 Testimony

Hello from Washington County PA! I am a refugee from the dark side of the climate movement, and have been fighting the toxic harms of fracking and coal mining since 2008. As the Founding Director of the Southwest PA Environmental Health Project, the Oil & Gas industry ravaged my life and my community. I spent over ten years desperately trying to help people on the frontlines of our local extractive war zone, while raising and trying to protect myself and my family

A war zone involves bombs, minefields, toxic gases. All of these have haunted our region since shale gas came to town. Pipelines have exploded. Toxic gas hangs low around homes in the early mornings. Wetlands below homes have been paved over and filled with poison, dooming the neighborhood above to cardiac diseases and more. There's nothing natural about shale gas, about ripping it out from stable deposits locking methane away from hundreds of thousands of years of accumulation, to be shot out in a gassy, toxic plume over several days or months or years.

Prior to gas? Homes cracked and businesses were wrecked from coal mining subsidence, acid mine drainage ruined streams, and hundreds of community members and entire neighborhoods were displaced, while those who struggled to win against King Coal sometimes lost their lives, living under the heavy weight of constant industrialized trauma.

And now? We are fully immersed in the tragedy of climate chaos these days, and the once-distant horizon of potential climate catastrophes has reared its ugly head into our daily lives this summer.

Millions of trees died this summer. Thousands of people died in floods. Lungs were choked with wildfire smoke, children have undoubtedly been exposed to leukemia-inducing chemical loads. Coral reefs in Florida were devastated, and may never fully recover. Overseas, and in the Global South, poverty is intensifying and nations are destabilizing as climate norms disappear.

No one can truthfully call out weather variations as an “unusually warm” winter anymore, or expect a 100-year storm to actually happen only once in a hundred years. Try every five years.

In the aftermath of COVID, I consulted on PFAS, and with local communities fighting oil & gas and plastics infrastructure, facing down the whole gamut of negative environmental contamination and environmental injustice, threatening our health, our future, our nation and our world.

Now I work with youth, and teachers. I am astounded and made hopeful by the level of commitment, energy, and knowledge our high school climate leaders show. And I am dismayed to hear their vast concerns. Why should they spend any time and energy worrying about coral bleaching? Because it dominates the news. What worries them about climate change? Everything.

Pennsylvania, our Common Wealth, has an outsized role to play in the climate chaos unfolding in our world. Legacy carbon molecules will be hanging out in the atmosphere for centuries. Carbon emissions from the early days of the Industrial Revolution, from the days when Pittsburgh was called “hell with the lid off” for the deep smoggy belches of industry, these carbon molecules will still be wreaking havoc as our world burns down to the end of this century.

Despite all this I remain hopeful, and I try every day to focus on the positive. In 3 to 5 years we could drawdown the excess carbon emissions in our atmosphere if we simply turn on a dime, and stop using all fossil fuels. Yes, I know that’s impossible. Is it? Politically, yes. For equity, and justice, likely.

And, imperative. Let’s turn on a dime. Let’s save our species. Let’s start today!