

**Joint Senate and House Democratic Policy Committee
A People's Budget: The Environment (2/25/21)**

Hello. My name is Dr. Ned Ketyer. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today.

I live and work in Washington County just south of Pittsburgh.

I am a pediatrician who retired from clinical practice in 2017. I am still a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Environmental Health.

I am a medical consultant with SWPA Environmental Health Project — a non-profit public health organization dedicated to helping people living near shale gas operations avoid harm.

I am a board member and President-elect of Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania, which helps gather the evidence regarding the severe health threats all of us face in Pennsylvania from fracking, and from climate change.

I am a cancer survivor — kidney, filtering organ — so I understand how chemicals in the environment make people sick, and sometimes destroy lives and livelihoods.

I am also a husband and a father, obligated to protect my family's health and safety at any cost.

My children deserve clean air and pure water, and so do yours — that is their constitutional right here in Pennsylvania. And all children deserve to live on a planet with a stable climate system in order to thrive.

The waters of southwestern Pennsylvania are polluted. The air stinks more days than it doesn't, and that seems to be the case throughout Pennsylvania. **Industrial polluters** need to be held accountable for the damage they are doing to the health of the people living nearby and to the communities in which they operate. The constant industrial stench isn't helping anybody in this state, except maybe the bottom lines of the industries doing the polluting.

Achieving and maintaining clean air, pure water, and preserving natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of the environment for all of us, and for future generations, requires agencies within our government — the DEP and DOH, especially — to actually protect the health of the environment and the people. The **statewide grand jury report** issued last summer made it crystal clear how those two agencies have failed to protect Pennsylvania's environment and public health. The report was scathing and found both agencies to be incompetent and negligent in their responsibilities to protect the citizens of PA, unresponsive to complaints of damage to health and property done by fracking. That damage is still happening today, and both agencies are underfunded and understaffed, made worse by the pandemic.

As you all know, we have a **childhood cancer crisis** in Southwestern Pennsylvania. High numbers of rare childhood cancers — leukemias, brain tumors, kidney tumors, and bone cancers like Ewing sarcoma — a rare and frequently fatal bone cancer in children, teenagers and young adults. Far more cases than would be expected to occur in a similarly populated, mostly rural area. And new cases keep popping up. Parents and doctors are deeply concerned that emissions, spills, chemicals, and dangerous toxic and radioactive waste from fracking may be to blame for this spike of rare childhood cancers. The DOH has commissioned two health studies regarding fracking, one of which will look a little deeper into the cancer crisis. But more studies need to be funded, including an urgent investigation into the industry's radioactive waste

stream, a crisis which the industry ignores, and the DOH and DEP show little interest in investigating.

The **grand jury** proposed eight recommendations that can go a long way to protect health, ensure safety, and regulate an inherently dirty and dangerous industry. These recommendations should be debated in the legislature and adopted. Regulators need the tools and the money to do their jobs of protecting the people without being influenced by the industries they regulate.

Funding will be critically important when Pennsylvania joins other states in the **Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative**, to stay compliant with the rules and standards that are implemented.

DEP and other agencies will be critical to the success of the governor's efforts to eliminate fugitive **methane leaks** from natural gas infrastructure. Unfortunately, those methane rules are still too weak and they must be strengthened by ramping up inspections and covering emissions from all gas wells, including low producing wells. All of this will require well-funded agencies that are well-staffed and not influenced by money and corporate talking points.

Earlier, I mentioned the different hats that I wear when I speak about the need for environmental protection and the need for public health champions in government. But there are two hats I don't wear: economist and politician.

I don't have to tell you that scarred landscapes and degraded ecosystems aren't good for the state's **economy**. That shale gas development is a disaster for the small towns that allow it. That expanding **petrochemicals and plastics** in SWPA will also be a disaster for the region as it turns into a new Cancer Alley. I believe any job that directly threatens my health and the health of my children, and the sustainability of life on this planet, isn't worth filling. We need to move beyond fracked gas and make other arrangements for our energy, transportation, food, and material needs. And the science says we need to do so very, very quickly.

I am not a politician either. So I implore each of you to acknowledge your connection with the natural world and with each other. Be a champion of public health because the health of your children and grandchildren, of your friends and neighbors, and of your constituents throughout the Commonwealth depend on you.

My mother used to say, "If you don't have your health, you don't have anything at all." Without a clean and vibrant environment, without clean air and pure water, without protections that prevent profit-driven corporations from harming us, we won't have good health. We won't have anything. 6:40

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- “The Human Toll” by Don Hopey and David Templeton, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Part 1 (May 14, 2019)

<https://newsinteractive.post-gazette.com/childhood-cancer-pittsburgh-pennsylvania-canon-mcmillan-pollution/>

Part 2 (July 18, 2019)

<https://newsinteractive.post-gazette.com/fracking-and-health-2/>

- *The Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking (the Compendium) - 7th edition* (December 2020)

<https://concernedhealthny.org/compendium/>

- Philadelphia Inquirer op-ed: “Biden’s executive order on oil and gas drilling does little to protect health in Pa.”

<https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/biden-executive-orders-climate-change-oil-gas-drilling-pennsylvania-20210202.html>

- SWPA Environmental Health Project

<https://www.environmentalhealthproject.org>

- Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania

www.psrpa.org