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Pa. Township Council Beats Back Referendum to Ban Drilling

By Lou Crocco On November 29, 2011

A referendum banning drilling in a western Pennsylvania township failed when it received less than 20 percent of the vote in the November elections. Solicitor for Peters Township William Johnson said that he and council members were "relieved."

"This ban would have been very costly and disruptive," Johnson said. "The election shows that common sense prevailed."

Citizens' group Marcellus Shale Awareness collected more than 2,500 signatures to get the question on the November ballot. The question would have amended the township's home-rule charter to ban the drilling. Johnson appealed to Washington County Court of Common Pleas Judge Paul Pozonsky to block the petition from appearing, but the judge ruled the court had no jurisdiction in the matter.

Johnson said that the petition violates case law, as well as the state's Oil & Gas Act and its Constitution.

The referendum, if approved, would have gone into effect immediately. It would have opened up the township to lengthy lawsuits, Johnson said.

"Bottom line is people have a right to lease their land and drillers have a right to extract the minerals from that land," Johnson said. "Hundreds of people would have had standing in court if this were approved."

Lou Crocco is a managing director of Duane Morris Government Affairs LLC. He is a former legislative leadership staffer in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. He works as a lobbyist-consultant at DMGA, representing clients both in Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C.

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