

Opening Statement | John Otto, Citizens Energy Council

Members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing, and for holding it here, in Westmoreland County and a special thank you to Representative Rasel and all the members of the panel for making it happen because these conversations matter.

My name is John Otto. Born and raised in Penn Township. Out of college I went into the United States Marine Corps. I came home, went through the police academy, and spent 31 years with the Penn Township Police Department – the last 15 as Chief.

Now, you might reasonably wonder what a cop knows about energy policy.

Here's what I know. I sat in the meetings. When gas companies came into our communities, I was at that table with our Commissioners, our road crews, and our fire chiefs. Road bonding. Traffic routing. Emergency response plans. Who calls who at two in the morning. I asked hard questions, because that was the job, and I didn't hand out the benefit of the doubt to anybody. And what I saw, year after year, was people doing it right.

I tell you that for one reason. I'm not a lobbyist. I don't have a political agenda, and I don't have out-of-state funders. What I have is a lifetime of knowing and serving these communities, and a set of facts.

That's why we started the Citizens Energy Council, landowners, farmers, business owners, and neighbors across Westmoreland and Armstrong counties. Our mission is simple: make sure the people who live here are in the conversation, and make sure our elected officials get the facts from their own neighbors instead of the loudest voice in the room.

So. The facts.

Since 2011, impact fees have sent more than \$24 million directly to Westmoreland's townships. Over \$2 million this past year alone. Washington Township, \$3.5 million. Sewickley, \$2.5 million. Hempfield, \$2.1 million. That paves roads and fixes bridges. It funds 911, fire and EMS, water and sewer, parks, farmland preservation. In a township with a tight budget, that is the difference between fixing a bridge and raising your taxes.

Second, affordability.

Prices are up. People's bills are up. Here's why: demand is growing faster than supply. And the answer to that problem is sitting right below us. Natural gas already makes 60% of Pennsylvania's electricity and heats more than half our homes. It saved Pennsylvania consumers nearly \$10 billion in 2024.

And guess what? Those savings can go even higher if we truly bring to bear all the above approach to energy where we utilize all of Pennsylvania's energy assets.

Yet meeting after meeting, local officials are pressured to make decisions that make it harder to produce energy by groups funded from somewhere else, pushing an agenda that is extreme political ideology masked as community concern.

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I'd ask those groups one question. When the bill comes due, what are you offering? You're not lowering anybody's electric bill. You're not paving a road. You're not putting new gear on a volunteer firefighter. That money has to come from somewhere and in this county, a lot of it comes from energy.

So let me close with an offer.

The Citizens Energy Council will sit down with you. Any member of this committee. Any supervisor, any council member, any county commissioner. Bring your hardest question. Bring the flyer somebody handed you at a meeting. We'll go through it line by line with the data, and I brought some of that data here today. I brought the facts, because that is what we are about. Facts not Fear.

And if we don't know an answer, we'll tell you we don't know, and we'll work together to figure it out.

That's all we're asking for. No special treatment. A conversation with the people who actually have to live with the outcome.

You know where to find me. I've been here my whole life, and I'm not going anywhere.

Thank you.