

Statement from Karen Feridun, Better Path Coalition

Thank you for taking on an examination of the state's response to climate change and for giving us an opportunity to meet with you as part of that process.

The Better Path Coalition turns a year old this week. Ours is a frontline- and grassroots-led statewide coalition of organizations and individuals forging a better path to a clean, renewable energy future and to a government that is responsive to its people.

The shale gas boom in Pennsylvania began 11 years ago. That's roughly the same number of years we have left, going forward, to address climate change. Only six studies had been done when the boom began. Physicians for Social Responsibility and Concerned Health Professionals of New York publish a compendium of research on fracking. When the 6th edition is released in a few weeks, it will cite roughly 1500 peer-reviewed studies that reveal a wide range of concerns, many that could not have been predicted 11 years ago. The research is far from complete. We find ourselves in the position now where we are simultaneously filling in the blanks on shale gas development, grappling with the unknowns of climate disruption, and trying to understand the nexus of the two.

Just one example is the explosion of the Revolution pipeline last September. The pipeline blew up after only a week. The explosion was attributed to the movement of earth caused by flooding rains in the area. The floods were enhanced or influenced by climate change. Climate change is exacerbated by greenhouse gas production. The industry had become its own victim. Recent extreme weather events, like two thousand-year floods in Maryland in the space of two years, prompted PBS News Hour to ask Michael Mann, who spoke at your session in State College, about the new normal. He responded that there is no such thing as the new normal, that things will only get worse if we fail to act on climate.

If a one week-old pipeline couldn't withstand climate-influenced flooding and we know that things will only get worse, how do you build the next pipeline? What are the specifications of a pipeline that must withstand the unknown? What laws and regulations are sufficient to oversee its construction and operation?

The fact is, nobody knows.

The frustrating part is that there is plenty we do know, yet the state isn't acting. We know, for instance, of hundreds of thousands of legacy wells that must be maintained in perpetuity to prevent methane leaks and on the ground impacts, yet the state hasn't come close to finding, much less maintaining most of them. Today's wells will be added to that costly legacy that will be the taxpayers' burden to bear.

Neither the unknowns nor the unaddressed issues have diminished our government's support of continued expansion of gas extraction. Governor Wolf called petrochemicals a "once-in-a-generation opportunity". That may be true of some past generation, but not this one. This generation's opportunity is to build the green economy needed for the transition to a clean, renewable energy future we truly can't live without. The European Parliament recently announced plans to ban single-use plastics, some of which are made from ethane extracted in Pennsylvania. The world is turning away from fossil fuels

and petrochemicals at the very time our government is going all in. According to Forbes, over the past ten years, "Pennsylvania's gas output has exploded 32-fold." We have yet to tally up the direct costs to the state of all that extraction, much less the indirect costs of the climate impacts it exacerbates. And none of that takes into account the myriad unrelated costs of climate change. The costs will surely be staggering. If we continue as we have, investing in yesterday's industries, Pennsylvania will be a graveyard of stranded assets unable to deal with them.

To borrow a metaphor Annie Leonard, the Executive Director of Greenpeace, used in a recent op-ed, when the bathtub is overflowing, what do you do first? Do you grab towels and start mopping up the water or do you turn off the tap? Our government has chosen a third option, a preposterous one, to turn up the water pressure. What communities in the shale fields, on the paths of pipelines, and near the sites of the attendant infrastructure already know is that there simply aren't enough towels. We need to turn off the tap.