

# Christians support Pa. methane reduction plan

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Jan. 19, Gov. Tom Wolf announced a new proposal to reduce methane from Pennsylvania's existing and new natural gas infrastructure. We applaud the governor's actions and are thankful that Pennsylvania is leading the nation by defending our children from the threats that fugitive methane releases have on our unborn and born children.

As pro-life evangelicals, we have a special concern for the unborn. We want children to be born healthy and unhindered by the ravages of pollution, pollution that impacts them even before they take their first breath. The medical community has long known of the environmental impacts on our unborn children. The once thought chemical protection a mother gives her developing child is untrue. Studies have shown that smog, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and air toxics have a disproportionate impact upon life in the womb. A recent study by Shaina L. Stacy and others at the University of Pittsburgh found evidence of low birthweight babies associated with proximity to unconventional natural gas wells in Butler County, Pa., and Lisa M. McKenzie, Colorado School of Public Health, published peer-reviewed research linking birth defects to methane production. The authors admit more research is needed, but the initial conclusions demand action to reduce natural gas releases.

These leaks in our natural gas infrastructure spew out smog precursors as well and, as such, add to our failing air quality. Pennsylvania already has over 277,000 children with asthma, according to the American Lung Association, and almost 28,000 live in the York-Harrisburg area. York County, like much of Pennsylvania's air, exceeds limits for both ozone (smog) and particulates (soot) emissions, making the need to stop natural gas leaks urgent. There is simply no way for Pennsylvania's air quality to improve with the vast amounts of methane spewed by thousands of natural gas installations across the commonwealth, both old and new.

These leaks also add to climate disruption. We want our loved ones, the unborn, and those yet to be born to inherit a world free of climate change. Yet, today from our natural gas infrastructure large amounts of methane are being released, a climate pollutant 86 times stronger than carbon dioxide, trapping heat over a 20-year timeframe. These next 20 years will determine whether our struggle to overcome climate change will be won or lost. That is why reducing methane is morally strategic.

For these reasons, almost 37,000 pro-life Christians from Pennsylvania have called for strong action to reduce methane emissions. Their request states:

"As pro-life Christians, we want the air that we breathe to be safe for our children. Leaks in our natural gas infrastructure spew out toxic pollutants, cancer-causing agents and climate

pollution that place God's creation and our families – especially children, pregnant mothers, and the unborn – in harm's way. That's why we call on our elected officials to support strong regulations to cut this pollution from both new and existing leaks from our natural gas infrastructure. Our children deserve nothing less.”

There will be industry groups yelling foul at another regulation. They say voluntary guidelines are enough. For the responsible firms, that is probably true. However, standards are not enacted for the good players but the poor reformers.

Recent research states that approximately 80 percent of the natural gas leaks result from 30 percent of the facilities. That suggests that many producers already see the value in minimizing leaks and the accompanying production losses. Escaping natural gas can't make a profit, but it can be extremely toxic and of immeasurable harm to our children's health.

Many lower cost operators do not exercise the proper care in running their operations, as they survive on the margins. While being sympathetic to the small business person, the current threats to children's health demand proper accountability. Supporting this new proposal creates, in effect, a police force to ensure our kids' health.

If we care for our children, now and in the future, let's work together to reduce methane and other pollutants that foul our air, our water and most importantly our children's lives. It's the right thing to do.

One thing we promise: we will not stop until pollution from the natural gas infrastructure is no longer a threat. Join us in making our world a safer and healthier place. Let's fix these natural gas leaks.

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