

VOICES

of Central PA

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Local man cycles toward sustainability

Opinions on Social Security benefit, national debt, Pennsylvania pensions

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Debt load growing for Penn State students

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Former bee queen still buzzing with information

Secondary school teachers keep students 'jazzed'

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The job of government and citizens

As I write this, the BP oil disaster continues to unfold in the Gulf. Day after day, thousands of barrels of oil spew up from 5,000 feet below, the giant oil slick slides closer and closer to shore, destroying all life in its path, the livelihoods of fishermen are strangled in the muck, and political opportunists find ways to point the finger at their enemies.

There is no doubt, especially after the Congressional hearings, that BP is responsible. It was the BP company man who insisted the oil rig workers take steps that put the entire operation at risk, according to their testimony. BP is to blame because it is the company that profited from that oil. The buck stops there.

And if, two months ago, the U.S. Government had told BP it should pay more taxes because oil is a common resource and we might need the funds for a clean up some day, or that the government should regulate more strictly because the public is at risk if something goes wrong, BP and its very wealthy and mostly Republican pals would

from the desk of managing editor

Suzan Erem

cry, "Get the government off our backs! WE invested in this product, and WE will be the only ones to control it. That's the American way."

Here we are. Now those same people are pointing the finger at the government and asking, "What are you going to do about it? Why aren't you helping us more? Where's the response?"

Well, there's only so much the U.S. Coast Guard can do; it's not in the oil business. It is on BP to fix this, and it is on President Barack Obama to do a clean sweep of the Minerals Management Service to rid it of holdovers appointees so this doesn't happen again. It's time regulators do what they are hired to do, and have laws with teeth to do it with.

And that's where healthcare and the Marcellus Shale come in. Where are the regulators to protect us from a for-profit healthcare system when it goes wrong? Where is the government agency that tracks doctors and hospital care so we patients can call or check online to see their track record and their qualifications before deciding to put our lives in their hands? The lack of such a sys-

tem was one motivation behind Tina Peterson's cover story this month. I want to thank everyone who shared their very personal health-care stories with us so we could tell that story.

But the Marcellus debate continues as well. Where is the fully-staffed agency with strong laws behind it that will protect residents and gas workers before something

blows and someone dies? Where is the tax on this drilling that would pay for such staff?

It's our job as citizens not to wait until an underfunded, over-politicized government becomes inadequate to the task of protecting us to then point the finger, but to do the much harder work of building systems that will optimize our safety and our collective good. Let us hope all of our lawmakers learn from this disaster in the Gulf, then act on it.

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