

Phil Hoy Op-ed
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By Phil Hoy

We all know what the oil and gas industry's bottom line is: maximized profits for a company's owners, be they millions of shareholders or a tight little family of multi-millionaires.

And we all know, or should know, what ranchers and other property owners try to do: make a living off their land while protecting and improving it for the generations to come.

Here in the Powder River Basin, we've seen these two fundamental goals coming into conflict, more frequently and more intensely. As a landowner outside of Gillette, I'm in one of these fights myself—and have been for quite a long time now.

Our government allows industry to proceed in an irresponsible manner. Like I said, we know what they're here for. Industry wants to make a bundle, to do it fast and cheap, and then to move on. Government and legislators want the tax revenue.

But the people of Wyoming will be left to deal with the consequences. The CBM industry touts that they are good neighbors. From my experience they are not. They should understand that I am fighting for preservation of my lifestyle, business, the future and the environment.

For years now, the state and federal agencies that should be looking out for individual property rights have instead lined up behind industry. And when you push ordinary people this long and this hard on something that means this much to them, eventually they're going to fight back. That's where I am now, and a lot of my neighbors and friends have reached that point, too.

What the CBM industry and the government have not figured out is the fact that fighting us over our property, our businesses and the environment is *costing them more* than it would to responsibly develop the methane.

The government, through the people, has given other industries rules and regulations for responsible development. Why does our government persist in allowing the CBM industry to operate without proper concern for other people's interests and the environment? Isn't it time we all spoke up for *responsible development*?

Some of my neighbors have signed on to a petition asking for stronger state regulations on water discharges from coalbed methane operations. I support their effort, because they're protecting their own property. Property rights really do count for something in Wyoming, or at least I thought they did.

And a few weeks ago, I made what for me is a significant contribution to the Powder River Basin Resource Council—where I serve as a board member—to help pay for our group's intervention in support of Montana's water quality rules. The audacity of the Wyoming government and the CBM industry is amazing! And now, they wish to impose their destruction and disregard on the citizens of Montana.

When our board discussed this action, none of us much liked the idea of siding with Montana against our own state of Wyoming. But the decision was unanimous. “When you’re right you’re right, and when you’re wrong you’re wrong,” one of the other board members said. “And Wyoming is wrong.”

Mostly our government interprets and enforces the regulations to benefit industry, without regard to individuals who don’t have the time or the hundreds of thousands of dollars it takes to fight the disregard for their property rights. This legal fight takes so long and costs so much that by the time it is finished irreparable damage is done. *Our government should stand for the individual’s rights!*

I’d like it if industry would do the right thing, but I sure don’t expect it to listen to me. Sooner or later, though, they will, because I love my country, my business and my lifestyle, and I am just too dumb to give up. I am not afraid to fight for what is right for myself and others. I am amazed that our government and legislators fail to act in the interests and the rights of individuals.

I’m a resident of the state of Wyoming and the government should be listening to me, too. When it does not, you can bet I will take a stand. *Please, show your concern and help to support our efforts for responsible government and responsible coalbed methane development.*

Our country and its people need the CBM industry. But our government needs to adopt *and enforce* responsible regulations for it, too. Other people and businesses should not pay the price or be damaged by this development, now or in our future.

Phil Hoy, a Gillette businessman and Campbell County landowner, grew up on a ranch in Niobrara County.