

**Testimony Presented by
Jim Snell, Business Manager
Steamfitters Local 420
before the
Senate Community, Economic & Recreational Development Committee
on
Tuesday, April 13, 2021
regarding
Pennsylvania's Energy Infrastructure in a Pandemic**

Majority Chairman Yudichak, Senator Mensch & friends within the energy industry who are in attendance;

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. On behalf of Steamfitters Local 420, we are eager to share our story about the importance of Pennsylvania's energy infrastructure and the role this essential sector continues to play in the state's response and recovery efforts related to this pandemic.

My name is Jim Snell, Business Manager for Steamfitters Local 420, which covers the city of Philadelphia and its collar counties, including the Allentown and Reading areas. All told, our union is several hundred strong — and more united than ever before, especially when it comes to matters that affect the work we do.

American energy and the life-sustaining products it creates have never been more critical than they are today as our state and nation continue to confront the global health-care crisis caused by the novel coronavirus.

Throughout this pandemic, we have celebrated the stories of food bank volunteers who kept families fed, teachers who found a way to ensure students learn, and doctors, nurses who literally risked their own lives to save others, doing so while facing a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other essential gear in health-care settings that were overwhelmed.

These brave men and women, among so many others, rightfully deserve our praise.

But one sector of the American economy that is often criticized --- and even vilified by some --- is playing a major role as well. From life-saving ventilators, protective masks, and

medicines to reliable heat and power for health-care facilities, our domestic oil and natural gas operators are providing the tools necessary to fight COVID-19.

Employees at Braskem America shut themselves inside their plant for 28 days to address supply shortages to manufacture the products needed for PPE. ExxonMobil reconfigured manufacturing operations in Louisiana to produce medical-grade hand sanitizer for donation to COVID-19 response efforts in Louisiana, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas. Energy Transfer donated military grade medical glasses to local first responders to help them limit direct contact with patients.

What do all these actions have in common?

All of them rely on pipelines that deliver energy resources like propane to petrochemical facilities, which then process them into polymers through a method referred to as “cracking.” Those polymers form the base of the tools we need to confront this crisis. Petrochemicals are essential for manufacturing penicillin; to purify drugs; to make devices such as artificial limbs and skin; for medical equipment including bottles, disposable syringes, and so much more.

The N95 mask alone relies on three petrochemicals for production. Single-use plastics like IV bags, syringes, blood bags, aprons, gowns, nasal cannulas, and medical tubing all help medical professionals control the spread of infection — and all of them are manufactured from feedstock harnessed from American energy and delivered safely by America’s vast pipeline network. The same applies to so many other pieces of medical equipment in our hospitals and long-term care facilities.

And that’s just health care. You may not like it, or you simply don’t want to admit it, but petrochemicals are used in a bewildering array of household products: Carpeting. Crayons. Detergents. Dyes. Milk jugs. Pantyhose. Perfume.

These fuels also are essential to keeping grocery store shelves stocked and neighbors fed. Those of you from rural areas of our commonwealth know that domestically produced natural gas and propane have been a boon to farmers. Natural gas is a feedstock for fertilizers and other agricultural products. Propane, a budget-friendly fuel because of its local abundance, gives farmers the opportunity for improved production with lower input costs. For some, propane is just as important as the tractor.

In other words, there is still a tremendous need for the traditional energy sources that power our everyday lives and serve as the feedstock for the products we rely on every day. And we all need to recognize that the highly skilled men and women who make up our work force are a resource as valuable as the energy itself.

And let’s please be honest with each other: The demand for these resources won’t change. What will change is where the energy products are processed and refined — somewhere overseas, where there are lax environmental laws. We’d pay an environmental cost for increased global pollution and a financial cost when we have to spend more for products we once made at home but now have shipped in from overseas.

Energy is sometimes a divisive issue, but one thing Democrats and Republicans agree on is the need to become more independent and less reliant on foreign sources. Not only is that happening right now, but roles are being reversed, with Pennsylvania helping to shape this new global energy dynamic. Increased development of the Marcellus and Utica shale formations has decreased our need for foreign energy sources and continues to bring enormous benefits to farmers, consumers and businesses across the state.

No one denies a shift is taking place in the way we power our economy. We understand the collective efforts that need to be made to protect our environment and address climate change, while also protecting our manufacturing and related industries — and the good-paying jobs they provide for families.

But this transition won't happen by simply flicking a switch.

This pandemic has taught us a lot about ourselves — and about the world around us. What many are beginning to realize is that America's energy resources aren't simply critical to our economy overall; they touch every aspect of our modern life. The continued safe and responsible operation and regulated development of these resources is essential to our well-being, and they remain the foundation for the transition we all want to see one day.

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