Ban Fracking protest at Michigan gas industry meeting met with fear, loathing and "empathy"

Ban Michigan Fracking, together with Central Michigan University's Student Environmental Alliance and MSU Greenpeace members, protested outside the Michigan Oil and Gas Association's (MOGA's) annual meeting in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, on February 16 while industry insiders met about fracking Michigan.

About 50 of us participated peacefully outside the meeting hotel parking lot with banners, signs, and chants as gas industry people arrived. It was a busy street corner. We raised awareness locally as cars and passersby gave us friendly honks and thumbs ups in solidarity. Except for one rather unfriendly man in a nice car and formally dressed, driving in to the evening MOGA banquet, who gave the group the finger, and several other conference-goers who, as they drove in, shook their heads in disgust.

Video of the protest:
http://youtu.be/Ot2aRlAWo3w

Our inside source, one of our members, Ellis Boal, attended part of the MOGA meeting. He reports that Chris Tucker, spokesperson for the gas industry-funded front group Energy in Depth , greeted the worried group of frackers, saying "I'm from Washington DC and I'm here to help."

Tucker is known for his work spinning the frack industry's polluting record and its use of "counterinsurgency" tactics such as psy-ops and "astroturf energy citizens" when dealing with the community. Referring to our presence outside, speakers acknowledged to the MOGA crowd that opponents have been successful in getting their message out.

At times sarcastic and angry, Tucker complained that the word "frack," (which arose in the industry itself), begins with an "f", ends with a "ck" and sounds "percussive." He wondered aloud "if the Collingwood [shale] would take off," in Michigan, but expressed confidence that the New York DSGEIS study (Draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement) would end favorably for the industry there. (See NY grassroots ban groups' report, Cuomo's Fracking Advisory Panel Fatally Biased, on why that would be).

Another industry PR spokesperson, Deb Muchmore, of Marketing Resource Group, told the group that MOGA worked hard to come up with their education foundation's fracking handout. She instructed members to show "empathy" when giving it out to opponents and people new to the issue.

Note: CMU has an online exhibit about the history of the oil and gas industry in Michigan, paid for and as told by. . . the oil and gas industry.

Publicity about the protest:

Not So Fast, Natural Gas: MI Students Protest Fracking Conference *WeArePowershift*, 2/16/2012

Students Protest 'Fracking' Thursday in Mt Pleasant, *CMU Life*, 2/16/2012

Later that evening, in Grand Rapids, Ban Michigan Fracking showed up at a screening of the film *Gasland*, being shown by the Sierra Club, recently discredited for taking $26 million from the fracking industry, to promote their frack reform bills.

During a question and answer period after the film, Ban Michigan Fracking shared with the 100 attendees why we are for a ban, our petition, and our opposition to the Michigan frack reform bills that tout "safe fracking." (See our post from Feb 6, 2012, below).

Photos by LuAnne Kozma.