

The Intelligencer. Wheeling News-Register

I-68 Proposal Gains Hearing in White House

What a difference a year makes.

That's the general feeling when our team with Shale Crescent USA, returned from Houston and World Petrochemical Conference in March.

When this journey started over two years ago, we didn't know where it would take us. So far, we have had memorable and successful trips to Houston for World Petrochemical Conference, Chicago for Global Plastics Conference and Orlando for National Plastics Expo.

We have told the story of our region's energy, water, location and workforce advantages to the Japanese in Tokyo and to key executive decision makers of some of the largest chemical companies in the world. We are now working with nine prospects and over a dozen leads. One prospect has committed to the region and has to decide where in the region they will locate. We hope to know soon. I talked to four companies in the Ohio Valley before the White House trip. All have hired and are continuing to hire. There are the high wage career jobs we dreamed would come here.

Our message is getting out to companies all over the world through the internet on sites such as www.yahoofinance.com and through publications like Chemical Week Magazine read by executives in the Chemical Industry all over the world. The Chemical Week June 25 issue did an interview with Wally Kandel, senior vice-president of Solvay in Belpre, Ohio, that also discussed

the IHS Study commissioned by Shale Crescent USA. The study said the Shale Crescent USA region is now the most profitable place in the world to build a petrochemical plant. The U.S. Department of Energy is very interested in this study.

Recently, we were privileged to tell the Shale Crescent USA region story to the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs at the Whitehouse in Washington, D.C. We were honored to be part of a meeting arranged by Marshall County Commission President Bob Miller, to discuss the I-68 Energy Corridor Expansion Project. This project would connect Morgantown to the Ohio Valley and ultimately extend I-68 across southern Ohio to I-77.

Businesses and industry in the Ohio Valley would have better access to east coast markets and ports, like Baltimore. An expanded I-68 would also connect the Shale Crescent region to West Virginia's fast growing eastern panhandle via I-68 and I-81. Currently we have State Route 2 running from Wheeling to Parkersburg. This is a combination of two and four lane sections, full of traffic and stop lights. Ohio Route 7 on the other side of the river isn't much better. For the Ohio Valley to grow to its potential, we need to have a better way to move goods and people in and out. An extended I-68 could be an answer.

In addition to Miller and myself, state Sen. Charles Clements, R-Wetzel, Dr. Brian Anderson (director, WVU Energy Institute), Dr. John Deskins (director, WVU Bureau of Business and Economic Research) and Mr. Bryce Custer (broker, Petroleum & Energy Services). Miller sees this as "*more than just a roads project.*" The I-68 project will encourage companies to come to the Shale Crescent USA. It will also help existing local companies to get their products to eastern markets quicker, more efficiently and encourage expansion.

The White House staff members we met were energetic, sharp, pleasant and engaged. I felt we were treated like a valued customer. These staffers seem to really enjoy what they do and were sincere about trying to help us. They gave us guidance on what we need to do for I-68 to have a chance as part of the infrastructure plan. There is a lot of local work to do in order to make the I-68 Energy Corridor expansion a reality. It is important that both governors

support the idea.

It was thrilling for me to be able to tell our region's story at the White House to those who care. We surprised them with the data and information we presented. We also put into context what it means to our nation. They understood. They also couldn't make any promises. But, at least we are on their radar now. We understand what has to happen at the state and federal level for I-68 to happen.

Maybe just as important for the Shale Crescent USA region, we now have contacts in the Executive branch at the White House that can be of assistance as we bring prospects to the region. They offered to introduce us to people in other cabinet departments as the need arises. The goal for us is still to bring high wage, career-type jobs back to Shale Crescent USA and improve the standard of living for everyone.

Most of my uncles, cousins and brothers worked in the steel and construction industries. My dad was a carpenter. I can't drive a nail straight. My dad told me, "*Son you need to go to college,*" that proved to be good advice. When I was growing up, I watched the steel industry decline and my relatives lose their jobs. The same thing happened to our petrochemical industry when OPEC became the source of most of our oil and the Gulf Coast became the source of our gas. West Virginia's population declined as our children left the state to find jobs. Eventually, we fell into an energy crisis when our nation's gas supply dwindled. Plans were being made to bring natural gas into the United States from OPEC and Russia. The LNG terminal at Cove Point, Md. was built as an import terminal.

Thanks to horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, the United States is now the leading natural gas producer in the world. The Shale Crescent USA region that contains the "*rust belt*" is now producing 30 percent of the USA's natural gas supply up from 3 percent in 2010. The LNG import terminal at Cove Point is now an export terminal. This year, West Virginia natural gas is being shipped out of Cove Point to India and Japan.

My relatives, like most Americans, don't have time to go to public meetings, protests or write letters. They are too busy working and providing for their families. Many times, they aren't aware of how the *"antis"* activities and government regulations impact their lives until it is too late. They also don't have the time or means to create jobs. They do understand the high-wage jobs that manufacturing and petrochemicals can bring back to our region.

We have our best opportunity in over 30 years to do something great for working families that will raise their standard of living by giving them an opportunity for high-wage career oriented jobs. Jobs that can give their children and grandchildren the opportunity to stay here if they choose. We can do this and improve our planet's environment.

Shale Crescent USA's abundant natural gas and natural gas liquids are the key. We will need infrastructure improvement like I-68 and the LNG Storage Hub. We will need to train our workforce. We will need to continue to market the region like Shale Crescent USA (the organization) is doing. Our trip to the White House was just another step. Now is our time. Our people have hope again. They deserve to win.

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