

# Quiet Session For Industry Refreshing To IOGA

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EVANSVILLE, IN.—With one eye on the coronavirus headlines, Illinois oil and natural gas companies gathered in March to discuss a quiet first two months in the general assembly, revisions to the state's enforcement code and how updates to state data systems affect geological nomenclature.

This year's Illinois Oil and Gas Association Annual Meeting, held March 3-5 at the Old National Events Center in Evansville, reflected the industry's resiliency in the face of political and economic challenges, industry leaders said.

"Attendance at the technical sessions was good, registrations were about the same as last year and the exhibitor list confirms there is still strong interest in showing here," reported IOGA President Bryan Hood, president of Shakespeare Oil Co.

## Quiet Session

The 2020 Illinois General Assembly had been, for the most part, quiet through February, assessed IOGA Past President Craig Hedin. That observation was echoed by IOGA Lobbyist Dan Reitz, who noted he was able to attend the convention because relatively few pressing issues were being considered in the Capitol.

"This session is very different than last year," he assessed. "In 2019, we were busy fighting four bad bills . . . all of which we managed to kill. And while it is true that not much happens before the state primary, we do not see anything on the horizon that could hurt us."

Reitz noted the Democratic supermajorities in both the House and Senate and first-term Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker were interested in clean energy legislation and in winning voter approval for an amendment to the state constitution that would shift Illinois to a progressive tax structure.

"They have put their eggs in one basket with that 'clean jobs' act," Reitz said. He added that the bill would offer increased incentives for renewables with an emphasis

on solar power since wind power already had expanded significantly in Illinois.

Reitz also emphasized the importance of both the industry's outreach to legislators and the benefits of the industry's public relations efforts. "Between the field tours and the materials produced by the Illinois Petroleum Resources Board, the word is getting out that the oil and gas industry is a very important driver of jobs and the economy in southern Illinois," he concluded.

## Ambitious Agenda

Formed in 1998 and funded by a voluntary operator and royalty owner check-off, IPRB's dual mission is to increase and improve the public's understanding of the oil and gas industry in Illinois, and to promote the cleanup and restoration of abandoned well sites and related facilities.

IPRB Executive Director Seth Whitehead told IOGA how key messages about oil and gas had been picked up by traditional news media across the state and reached new audiences through IPRB's increased social media presence. "Traditional media outreach still can be effective,"

Whitehead commented. "Newspapers are not as influential as they once were, but a lot of people still read the opinion page."

Within the past calendar year, IPRB has written or helped produce 37 guest opinion columns in local papers, he detailed. "We can provide the facts and figures that give a guest column the credibility editors look for. People often assume that those in the news business don't like the oil industry, but that isn't necessarily true. Bad stories are usually due to a lack of communication. If you present the facts, they will usually give you a fair shake."

Whitehead observed that the jobs and tax revenue figures found in a recent industry economic impact study had proven effective in breaking through the clutter of everyday news. For example, he said, the Illinois industry's \$3.04 billion economic impact includes \$330 million in annual state business, production and income taxes. He also noted that more than \$93 million in ad valorem taxes have been collected since 2007 to fund schools and local infrastructure. Further, the more than 1,000 production and service companies in Illinois' industry support 14,000 direct jobs, while more than 30,000 lease and interest holders receive royalty income from production.

"To show their support for the industry, 17 counties representing 90 percent of the state's production region have passed resolutions affirming their support," Whitehead noted.

## Social Media

One of the most effective means of countering an organized opposition, Whitehead indicated, is to present facts about industry's value in everyday life and the many ways it protects people and the environment. He said IPRB discovered social media—with its ability to disseminate information quickly—was an effective tool for industry outreach.

"With a single ad on Facebook, we reached 42,500 people and got a reaction from 4,200," he said. "There is not another paid media we can use that produces



Although IOGA had to fight numerous anti-industry threats during the 2019 Illinois General Assembly, the 2020 session has featured no such threats, reports IOGA Lobbyist Dan Reitz. Reitz offered his remarks during IOGA's 2020 annual convention, held March 3-5 in Evansville, In.