

## // FRESH TAKES //



FILE PHOTO

## TEEN EDITORIAL

## Does Pitts pander to pipeline partners?

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Overall, Joe Pitts is a decent guy; at one point, he probably cared about those whom he represents. However, now that he is firmly entrenched in his gerrymandered district, it is hard to reasonably argue that his primary goal is to serve the constituents of the 16th District.

Rather, he ostensibly seeks to appease the donors who will contribute enough money to get him re-elected, so he can continue to collect his handsome salary before possibly becoming a lobbyist and making even more money.

One such donor is Williams Partners, which has donated \$15,000 to Pitts' campaigns since 2006, and which presently seeks to build a pipeline through Lancaster County by asserting eminent domain through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

Instead of representing the people of his congressional district, many of whom are opposed to the pipeline, Pitts had hosted a bus tour for local lawmakers to meet with Williams Partners representatives in what he preposterously called a "fact-finding mission."

A passive observer might look at this and call it an appropriate course of action. This editorialist was almost one of them. And then it came out that Pitts hand-picked the lawmakers he invited such that he only invited those who unequivocally support the project, and shut out those who do not.

Several months later, LNP reported that one of Pitts' top aides, Tom Tillett, has — whether intentionally or not — intimidated some Lancaster County residents. LNP's report stated that Tillett "smugly reminded them that a majority of their fellow residents voted for Pitts."

Tillett wrote in an email to a constituent: "I assume you drive, like hot showers, like your food cooked, the lights to turn on, etc. ... where do you think this energy comes from?"

Insofar as oil powers millions of homes, Tillett may have a point, but even the Atlantic Sunrise website, "the vast majority of natural gas transported by this project will be consumed domestically in markets along the East Coast."

"Along the East Coast" ... not exclusively in Lancaster County, or even in Lancaster County at all.

Regardless of whether this pipeline is built, it is disingenuous to assert that without its production, energy accessibility will be altered in Lancaster County.

Tillett and Pitts both deny allegations that they are in cahoots with Williams Partners. Pitts has

### WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

1) This pipeline could cut right through your property, or a community space about which you care.

2) You have a voice. Write FERC to share your opinions on the process, the environment, the energy, etc. Go to [ferc.gov/filing/ecomment.asp](http://ferc.gov/filing/ecomment.asp). The docket # is 14-8.

3) There are legitimate concerns about how our representative in Congress and his staff are handling this issue.

repeatedly stated that, rather than publicly take a side on the pipeline, he simply wants to provide his constituents with information.

That is a laudable goal, but surely, the job of a congressman transcends what is generally "staffed out" to interns.

In politics more than anything, perception is reality.

When a staffer is intimidating constituents, making them feel as if the politician is speaking for the entity that seeks to rip up its land to build a pipeline, regardless of what that politician intends, they are wrong, and need to make amends promptly. Perception is reality.

Yet Pitts has doubled down on his political strategy.

Any contributions from the entity that seeks to build a pipeline should be used to run advertisements assuring Pitts' constituents that he absolutely will not be influenced by those contributions.

One of the few positive effects of federal government bureaucracy is that this issue is unlikely to have gone away in two years, when Pitts is next up for election. Most of the readers of this editorial will be eligible to vote in that election.

The question those voters will have to consider is whether Pitts is the best person in the 16th district to represent their views, needs, values and goals in Congress.

Pitts sits on the committee that has direct oversight of FERC; that should be an asset to the 16th district.

However, Pitts receives significant campaign contributions from the entity lobbying FERC to build a pipeline in that district, and seems unwilling to handle that massive conflict of interest.

For whom will Pitts advocate?

When one of his staffers says, "I guess my mistake was trying to help (constituents concerned over the pipeline) because it has gotten me nothing but grief," the answer seems clear: not us.