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Burns promotes regionalism

Predicts huge business rush from shale development

by Christian Morrow

Courier Staff Writer

As the past chairman of the Western Pennsylvania mission, it is not surprising that J. Bracken Burns favors consolidation of Allegheny County municipalities, but in some circumstances, he favors creating regional agencies that would exercise authority over several counties and perhaps into neighboring states.

Burns, a Washington County commissioner since 1996, told members at the Oct. 16 African American Chamber of Commerce power breakfast that while everyone likes the access to municipal mayors and council members, the sheer number of political subdivisions in the region are almost unmanageable.

"There are 550 municipalities in the southwestern 10-county region. Of those, 80 percent have less than 5,000 residents," he said. "Thirty percent have less than 1,000 residents—that's not even enough for a decent pep rally. To build the future we need a new era of regionalism." Areas of waste, redundancy and inefficiency, he said, would benefit from a regional control including infrastructure improvement, water and land management and mass transit.

"Look at the Moon Valley Expressway. Right now, it's the expressway to Large, Pa.—let's finish it," he said. "And water, Pittsburgh's three rivers are a huge asset, but water also means issues with flooding, contaminants, sewage, water quality and supply. Right now, we have 850 entities in the region trying to coordinate those issues."

Burns said that "Pittsburgh" isn't really 10 counties either, but also encompasses parts of Ohio, Maryland and West Virginia.

"It's 32 counties in reality," he said. "If you hear of a group called 'The Power of 32,' that's what they are looking at." From a business perspective, the future



PHOTOS BY ROSANNO STEWART

WELCOME—African American Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Doris Carson Williams welcomes guest speaker Washington County Commissioner J. Bracken Burns at the Oct. 16 power breakfast.

of this region, he said is the Marcellus Shale deposit, the largest area of which runs under Western Pennsylvania. The deposit is infused with large reserves of natural gas, a cleaner fuel than either coal or oil for generating electricity.

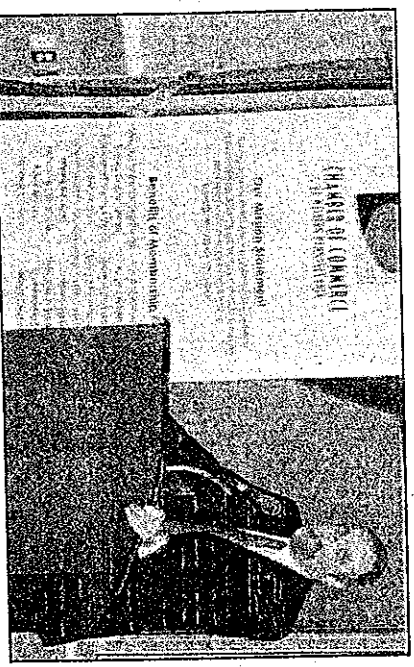
"And those reserves are bigger and better than anybody thought," said Burns. "Last year, estimates were that the shale contained 50 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Now, after drilling a few holes and running some tests, they've upped the estimate to 2,045 trillion cubic feet."

In 2008, he said, there was \$2.3 billion spent on gas exploration, creating 29,000 jobs. In 2009, it's been \$3.8 billion and we're now up to 48,000 jobs. In 2020, the estimated investment will be \$13.5 billion, yielding 173,000 jobs.

Of all the wells drilled so

means supplying parts, laying pipes to move product. It also means opportunities for accounting services, sales and public relations. "That's where we're headed."

(Send comments to cmorrow@ncupittsburgh-courier.com.)



REGIONAL REALITY—Washington County Commissioner J. Bracken Burns says thinking and acting regionally will better address civic and environmental problems while fostering business opportunities.