

I was born in Murrysville. In the 1880s, Murrysville was the site of the construction of the first commercial methane gas well in history. Commercial methane extraction began quite literally in my backyard. In Murrysville, this is treated like a local point of pride.

Should we be proud of this chapter of my region's history?

Three years after it was drilled, the Haymaker Well caught fire and burned, in one of the worst manmade disasters to ever strike Southwestern PA. The flames could not be extinguished. The well burned for months. The flames rose so high into the sky that the fire could be seen from Pittsburgh, 20 miles away.

You would think we would have learned from that, but today, we rely on fossil gas more than ever. We are treated every month to news stories about deadly pipeline explosions and toxic wastewater spills.

We don't get to choose our past. None of us can stop the Haymaker well from being drilled. But over and over again, in the 140 years since the Haymaker well blew out, people in power have chosen to repeat the same mistake. One explosion and months-long fire should have filled the lawmakers and regulators of our region with a deep shame and a drive to make sure it never happened again, yet here we are with more wells than ever, hotter skies than ever, deadlier storms than ever.

Pennsylvania exported this misery to the world so that a handful of robber barons could profit. They have been murdering us, our neighbors, and the residents of the Global South for money for 140 years, and our government has stood by and shrugged.

We have the technology to abandon methane forever, but it isn't being deployed. This is not "inaction" - it is an active choice. The robber barons wake up every day and choose to keep drilling. Our legislators, governor, and regulators wake up every day and choose to keep letting them.

It is time to build an energy system that won't shoot flames into the sky that are visible from 20 miles away.

The Murrysville gas well is so revered in my hometown that it is literally emblazoned on that city's logo. Yet, even in its romanticized image on the city seal, it is depicted in flames.

We don't get to choose our past, but I reject that future.