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Industry At Communication Crossroad

By Edward P. Cross

TOPEKA, KS.—The oil and gas industry today stands at an interesting crossroads. In the public policy arena, we are truly an industry in transition. On one hand, we can take pride in our education initiatives and the progress we have made over the past several years to bring a better public understanding of the challenges facing our nation. Many Americans are beginning to see the link between greater access to energy resources and our ability to supply them with the energy they need.

On the other hand, we must work with the harsh realities of a political landscape in which our industry is under assault and vilified. For some, the concept that an industry can exercise its traditional goals while meeting its responsibility to protect the environment is seen as being against the best interest of the nation.

We must bear some of the responsibility for this lack of understanding. For decades, the oil and gas industry assumed the public understood us. We believed that if we did our jobs right and continued to provide Americans with the energy they needed, all would work out well.

However, public confidence in our industry has eroded to the point that we lack credibility in some areas. We gain very little by having the facts on our side when those facts are automatically dismissed simply because they come from us. As a result, we are under one of the more difficult and intense assaults our industry has ever faced.

Complicating matters, we do not and cannot control the agenda in this new landscape. Promoting our goals and protecting our interests has become more challenging both in Washington and in

state capitals. We are faced with the task of focusing the harsh light of reality onto the fantasy world in which too many of our policymakers have found refuge. Many policymakers speak with sincerity about an economy and a society that can thrive without oil and natural gas. And we must operate in a political environment in which our industry is viewed as an unlimited source of money.

Kansas Reponse

The Kansas oil and gas industry began developing an energy education program in 2001 through the Kansas Independent Oil & Gas Association Educational Foundation. The effort was developed to respond to public frustration and anger over supply disruptions; energy, economic and environmental misconceptions; and consumer prices. But it was fueled by a fundamental lack of understanding about how our industry functions in the marketplace, and why oil and gas are so important to our economy, security, and standard of living.

All this misinformation was funneled into a growing pool of disrespect and disdain for oil and gas. So in response, the Kansas industry created energy education programs to begin to deal with the challenge.

In 2008, the Kansas Oil & Gas Resources Fund (KOGRF) energy education program was launched. The KOGRF was formed to broaden support and help ensure that energy education in Kansas was industry-driven. Some of KIOGA's energy education programs were rolled into the KOGRF effort.

We began our industrywide effort to achieve collectively what we could not accomplish individually. We identified two strategies to achieve our goal:

- A public information campaign designed to improve the image and credibility of the Kansas oil and gas industry through innovative marketing strategies; and
- An education campaign designed to increase awareness about the significance and viability of the Kansas oil and gas industry.

A strategic plan was developed to define the challenge, and to outline goals, expected outcomes, performance indicators and specific objectives. The campaign uses a combination of components, including radio, television, outdoor and print advertising; news media, civic club and professional presentations; on-site and online marketing; and standards-based energy education for kindergarten through 12th grades. All these components have been supported by issue-specific legislative advocacy.

Over the past several months, the Kansas industry has integrated several pieces of our energy education and public information programs into a single campaign to allow us to reach a broader audience. Titled "Kansas Strong—Energy from the Heartland, Strength for our Nation," the campaign has the dual goal of growing pride for our oil and gas industry, and informing the public about what the state's oil and gas industry means to Kansas' economy and society, as well as imparting that we are part of our nation's energy solution. This full integration allows us to be more efficient and effective.

Response And Anticipation

New political and public perception realities demand quicker action. KIOGA now views its energy education and public information efforts as a campaign for which there is no downtime and no room

for indecision. We move to act and react quickly and with precision. We are positioning ourselves to be better able to not only react to events, but also to anticipate events so we can prepare effective preventive strategies.

We have developed teacher workshops, classroom presentations, and curricula designed to address energy issues that meet Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) K-12 learning standards for both science and social science. Many of the programs have been accredited in part by the National Science Teachers Association and the National Youth Leadership Council. The KSDE has advocated our energy education program for use in Kansas schools.

Textbooks do not offer in-depth explanations about oil and natural gas. Our classroom energy education programs teach students the truth about the Kansas oil and gas industry, dispel misconceptions about important environmental and economic issues, and explain what the oil and gas industry is doing to make Kansas' future brighter. For the first time, thousands of Kansas students, teachers and citizens are learning the truth about the oil and gas industry. KSDE's endorsement provides credibility for the KIOGA-developed curricula and lesson plans.

We continue our quest to provide better energy education to all Kansans by producing youth-g geared media. Material is disseminated on a wide range of oil, gas and energy issues through a variety of media, including brochures, booklets, posters, coloring books, CDs, VHS/DVD videos, lesson plans and curricula.

Recognizing that better education will be of critical importance to our state, nation, and industry in meeting energy challenges, KIOGA's "petro pros" program brings petroleum professionals into the classroom. Petro pros volunteer their time and effort to visit schools and educate students about the science and business aspects of the Kansas oil and gas industry. These petro pros are our best messengers. We have a process to educate and mobilize this vast network.

Demand for petro pros' presentations has grown tremendously. With more than 50 industry volunteers, we reached 860 students in 28 presentations during the first three months of 2009 alone! The cumulative number of Kansas students impacted by our energy education programs is now more than 8,500.

KIOGA's public information marketing campaign focuses on optimizing target rating points using television, radio, print and Web-based media to reach 90 percent of the Kansas media market. The campaign utilizes cable, affiliate news, prime and

sports programming, *Wichita Eagle* newspaper print advertisements, and a Kansas.com Web site presence.

Changes In Communication

We have made progress in our efforts, but we still have much to do. As we look to the future, we must deal with a major shift in the political landscape. We are facing rapidly changing demographics and tools of engagement. If the oil and gas industry is to survive this onslaught, we must bring to Americans a better understanding of our industry and the adverse consequences of limited access and burdensome taxes. We must disseminate our message and story to policymakers and consumers, who increasingly no longer rely on newspapers, radio, and television for information.

The world of communications and advocacy is changing. As an industry, we have long employed one-way communications that primarily entailed transmitting information to selected targets. We hoped our target market would use that information in a way that was beneficial to us. We had no real expectation that the target audience would question or challenge our facts and positions, or simply request additional information.

The maturation of the Internet has radically altered communications. Communications now are instantaneous. If one knows with whom he wants to communicate, he can do so directly and instantly. And that person can respond just as directly and as quickly. Recognizing this, KIOGA is taking steps to dramatically increase its presence in Internet venues.

Let us look more closely at this new communication paradigm. Last year's presidential campaigns used Internet, e-mails, and blogging. Barack Obama had more than 13 million active online supporters. In March, the White House mobilized those 13 million voters to pressure Congress to approve the president's budget proposal—the same budget proposal that would impose \$30 billion in new taxes on our industry.

Two-thirds of all members of Congress have a presence on the Facebook social networking site. One in 10 is on Twitter, the instant-messaging utility that allows persons to update their status to anyone who signs up for such updates.

Seventy-nine percent of congressional chiefs of staff, 66 percent of senior policy advisers, and 65 percent of legislative assistants read blogs. Even more significant is that 90 percent of congressional staffers use blogs to help determine constituent opinion, and 60 percent of them prefer online resources when preparing their members for a vote.

Facebook landed its 150 millionth user in five years. In comparison, it took 89 years for 150 million telephones to be sold. Clearly, the world of communications is changing drastically and rapidly. And so, too, has the world of advocacy.

BRIEF Project

In 2007, several anti-oil-and-gas-development groups, including the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Oil & Gas Accountability Project, began mounting attacks on key federal statutes governing the exploration and production industry.

Specifically, these organizations want hydraulic fracturing to be regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act, crude oil to be regulated under the Superfund Environmental Damage Compensation Law, oil field wastes to be regulated under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, stormwater discharges from oil and gas development to be regulated under the Clean Water Act, and air emissions to be regulated under the Clean Air Act. In essence, these groups advocate that no law but federal law can adequately protect the environment.

Given these realities and recognizing the knowledge gap on the crucial role American oil and gas producers play in delivering secure and affordable energy to consumers, the Liaison Committee of Cooperating Oil & Gas Associations began an ambitious campaign to set the record straight. Liaison was soon joined by the Independent Petroleum Association of America, American Petroleum Institute, U.S. Oil & Gas Association, and others to bring a wealth of new information and deploy an aggressive communications strategy designed to separate fiction from fact, myth from reality, and hyperbole from proven, on-the-ground practices.

The Bringing Real Information on Energy Forward (BRIEF) project has responded to environmental attacks by developing communication and advocacy messages that revolve around risk management and regulation by experts, highlighting the constant improvements in state regulatory programs. BRIEF has developed information necessary to counter the anti-oil-and-gas-development groups' efforts, and has created mechanisms to broadly spread that information in multiple venues. Visit www.energyindepth.com to learn more about this effort.

Back To The Future

In the past, communication was characterized by an exchange of information and ideas, e.g., people chatting over backyard fences, on driveways or at neighborhood barbecues. The communication

was not one-way. People talked, asked questions, and responded. Much of that was lost when people moved inside their homes and limited their engagement with the outside world to listening to radios or watching television.

We have gone back to the future. Today when one party puts out a message, it expects that whoever gets that message will respond, which may necessitate another message. This is done quickly and with no geographic boundaries. People are demanding information when they need it, and they will get that information from other sources if we tell them they must wait until the 6 o'clock news or the next morning's newspaper.

As an industry, we must move quickly to embrace the modern tools of successful communication and advocacy. This does not mean we eliminate the proven methods of the past; it means that we adapt to the times. We need to be sophisticated and

aggressive in expanding the face of our industry. We need to exploit proven methods while deploying every asset available. We need to build on what we started, but continue to quickly adopt the modern tools of communication and advocacy. Visit www.kansasstrong.com to see how we are doing this in Kansas.

The future is exciting. If we approach it correctly, we can take advantage of our energy education efforts to advance our cause and place the oil and gas industry in its rightful role as an essential part of modern society. Our energy education efforts in Kansas allow us to do collectively what each of us cannot do individually.

The oil and gas industry has a rare opportunity to reposition itself from the largely defensive and reactive posture of the past 30 years into a more positive, proactive, forward-looking force. By working together, the collective focus of the oil and gas industry can be unleashed! □



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