

Lately we've been hearing a great deal about growth potential and attendant jobs in the gas and petroleum industry. "Oil Industry: Want jobs? Start Drilling" reads a recent *TribuneEagle* headline. Then a flyer advertised a gas-and-oil jobs fair on September 17 at the Holiday Inn by SOS Staffing, a company that recruits nationwide for a variety of positions. Were jobs available for college graduates? For mid-level managers laid off in other industries? For women seeking a toe hold in the jobs market? Don't I wish. The jobs available were what the industry calls "roughneck." Attendance at the job fair was meager; not a single applicant had showed up by the time I visited around 11 AM. "We had good response in Longmont, Colorado," said recruiter Brad Patrick. "Between 100 to 125 applicants showed up." Asked what companies in Wyoming were looking to fill positions, Patrick declined to answer. Do the jobs pertain to the Niobrara oil play? "That's a good guess," he said.

Wyomingites have reason to beware of roughneck jobs. Alexandra Fuller has repeatedly written on and spoken out against industry safety hazards and violations. She testified to the 2009 Wyoming legislature; her article on that experience appeared in WTE on February 14, 2009.

Fuller had composed a nonfiction book on Colton Bryant, the roughneck who fell to his death on a snowy night with poor visibility. "It would have cost Patterson-UTI two thousand dollars, at the most, to have safety rails where Colton fell," she writes in the concluding "Author's Note." She also reports on the record revenues that year by the company: "On May 3, 2006, less than three months after Colton's death, Patterson-UTI Energy announced record results for the first quarter of 2006. Their net income for the quarter had increased 174 percent . . ." Six serious safety violations were found relating to Colton Bryant's death, yet OSHA, the Wyoming Occupational Safety and Health watchdog, limited itself to a slap on the wrist, imposing a fine of \$7,031 on Patterson-UTI. "Beyond worker's compensation, Colton's family received no compensation for his loss." Colton left behind a widow with two small children.

Fuller then speaks on the accidents and fatalities that have plagued Wyoming, citing Ray Ring's article of April 2, 2007: "At least 89 people died on the job in the Interior West's oil and gas industry from 2000 to 2006 . . . Of those deaths, Wyoming is responsible for thirty-five, by far the highest percentage." And, from the *Casper Star-Tribune*: "Wyoming has the highest rate [in the nation] of job fatalities with 16.8 per 100,000 workers and Montana has the second highest . . ." She adds that, "No rig hand I spoke to beyond those associated with a fatality on the rigs—even those who had worked in the industry for decades—has ever seen an OSHA compliance officer on the oil patch."

In other words, OSHA checks compliance after a failure rather than prevent it. When Fuller testified to a legislative committee on behalf of roughnecks for the passage of HB 273, which would define the duties of worksite owners, the measure was defeated. "The oil and gas industry . . . can afford to exert non-stop pressure on the Legislature," she wrote in the aforementioned article, titled "Oil and gas industry rules the state Capitol—for now."

No wonder the young men of Wyoming are loath to apply for the SOS jobs.

Meanwhile a legislative committee explores options to “boost energy development literacy,” since our legislature set aside “up to \$750,000 annually” to pay for “educational programs concerning mineral and petroleum resources and industries,” wrote Trevor Brown in this paper on September 15, 2011. A legislative infomercial at public-school level for upcoming job-seekers? Not a peep about renewable energy resources in Wyoming, plentiful enough in terms of solar, wind, and geothermal exploration to provide a host of jobs, now and in the future.

The Petroleum Association of Wyoming’s website, www.pawyo.org, under “Association Info” states that “In addition to its legislative and regulatory work, PAW produces material to aid the public’s understanding of the need for a healthy, viable petroleum industry . . .” Yet the charts under “Oil and Gas Facts” show a marked decline in the state’s petroleum production, which I take to indicate the fact that we are post-peak oil, which geologists warn is happening world-wide. Inasmuch as shale-oil extraction draws on the energy equivalent of two barrels of oil to produce three barrels of the stuff, our state and its industries urgently need to turn to renewable energy. “State lawmakers could change wind tax,” reads another recent headline, referring to a tax that currently makes wind-harnessing disadvantageous. We’ll see what comes of it.