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A New York State of Mind?

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Those who tell you that natural gas has never been produced from shale in New York don't know the history of Chautauqua County, and certainly don't know the story of a fellow by the name of William Hart.

Intrigued by tales he had heard from local settlers of streams and creeks that could literally be [set on fire](#) in the area (naturally, of course), Hart made the trip from Connecticut to Fredonia, N.Y. in 1819 — and by 1825, had done something that no one in the world previously had: He drilled a successful natural gas well. Twenty-seven feet deep; right next to that “burning” creek; right into a shallow strata of shale. Thirty-four years later, Col. Edwin Drake would drill the first-ever oil well 70 miles down the road in Titusville, Pennsylvania. Modern society was born.

Most folks don't identify New York as the birthplace of natural gas, and even those who do are surprised to learn the state has more than 13,000 active wells in operation today. Some for oil, others for natural gas – just about all at some point in their life undergoing a procedure known as hydraulic fracturing, a technology that's been in use for 60 years and deployed across the country more than 1.1 million times.

Thanks to hydraulic fracturing, New York's natural gas production over the past 20 years has consistently been on the rise – from 1.7 billion cubic feet a month in 1991, to a peak of 5.35 billion cubic feet produced in [in December 2006](#). Nothing to sneeze at, for sure — but also nothing on the scale of the 2 billion cubic feet that [estimates suggest](#) a **single county** in the Southern Tier (Broome) can produce **in a single day** by tapping the Marcellus Shale.

Of course, accessing those resources requires the use of hydraulic fracturing. But thanks to a vote in Albany earlier this week, the prospect of this technology being available in the future to help convert this natural gas into jobs (900,000 NY'ers currently unemployed) and revenues (Albany currently dealing with a [\\$9 billion](#) budget shortfall) suddenly became a lot more uncertain. [Here's how Bloomberg](#) reported the story:

The state Senate approved a measure late [Tuesday] that would prohibit new drilling permits until May 15 in the New York portion of the Marcellus Shale The moratorium passed 49-9. ...

“Not only did they pass it but it passed overwhelmingly,” Assemblyman Robert Sweeney, a Democrat from Suffolk County who sponsored his chamber’s version of the bill, said in an interview. “That opens the way for us to do to the bill in the Assembly where I would expect it to pass with similar overwhelming numbers.”

Just in case you're scoring at home – no, there is no Marcellus Shale in Suffolk Co., N.Y. And no: It's not likely that Assemblyman Sweeney knows the history of natural gas in his state, or the important and long-standing role that hydraulic fracturing – which his bill seeks to ban – has played in helping to deliver a portion of the [1.18 trillion cubic feet of natural gas](#) that New York consumes each year.

But you know what else this fellow probably doesn't know? He doesn't know that his bill is written in such a way that it could actually be used to shut down **all future oil and gas production in New York** — even if it doesn't have a thing to do with the Marcellus Shale. Don't believe us? Let's consult the experts over at [over at ProPublica](#):

But the language in the final bill as it is posted on the state's website does not differentiate between the different ways hydraulic fracturing can be used. **It appears to be a blanket prohibition that would also stop hydraulic fracturing in New York's many vertical oil and gas wells** and would apply to drilling in geologic formations outside the Marcellus.

Keep in mind the state of New York is a member of the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission, whose mission is to promote the “responsible development of our own resources,” make “oil and natural gas more affordable for consumers,” and leverage those resources for the purpose of “creating and maintaining jobs.” With this week's vote, the Senate of New York has unfortunately gone rogue – and in the process cast serious doubt on the jobs, revenue, security and environmental benefits that would've been made possible through the responsible development of the Marcellus.

Naturally, the news out of New York this week didn't escape the notice of PA DEP secretary John Hanger, who rightly took exception with the suggestion from the state Senate that his department has somehow been asleep at the switch – notwithstanding the fact that DEP has added scores of new oversight staff to the rolls (actually doubled it since 2008), and continues to post and enforce some of the most stringent regulations on the development of shale gas in the entire country. Here's what he told the Wilkes-Barre Citizens Voice today:

The senators' criticism raised the ire of [Hanger], who defended the state's environmental regulations on Thursday and criticized New York for riding the moral “high horse while consuming Pennsylvania gas.” “If they are so ashamed of what's gone on here perhaps they should stop buying Pennsylvania gas,” Hanger said.

The good news is that this debate is far from over, with one leading Democratic candidate for governor in New York telling reporters this week that he still wants to learn all “the facts” before rendering a

position on how best to manage this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Of course, the minute this debate becomes more about facts than fear – that’s the minute we win it. Not for the industry’s sake. Not for the memory of William Hart. But for the people of New York who deserve far more and far better than what some in the ranks of their elected leadership are currently giving them.

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