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Cuomo, gas drilling activists meet in Ithaca

Candidate for governor preaches reform in Albany, does not take sides on fracking issue

By Stacey Shackford • sshackford@gannett.com • August 19, 2010, 10:40 pm

ITHACA -- Andrew Cuomo made the campaign rounds through the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier on Thursday, promoting his call for reform in Albany.

While here, the Democratic candidate for governor heard from many promoting the need to prevent [natural gas](#) drilling in the region's Marcellus Shale.

Cuomo spoke in Ithaca and in Montour Falls on Thursday, finding natural gas protesters at both sites, especially in Ithaca.

One was dressed in a hazardous material suit marked with the phrase "Inspector for 1,000 wells" and holding a "box of loopholes." Another held an empty leash and a sign that read "My dog drank the water."

In a gathering on The Ithaca Commons before Cuomo's scheduled appearance, Toxics Targeting president and gas drilling activist Walter Hang congratulated local activists for helping to put the brakes on drilling.

"The longer we push this off, the longer the de facto moratorium on gas drilling stays in place," Hang said.

He held up a recent letter from the U.S. [Environmental Protection Agency](#) outlining significant concerns with the scope and content of the state Department of Conservation's environmental impact statement draft under review.

"This could be our salvation," Hang said. "We've got to kill the draft with the EPA's help."

Cuomo said he was expecting such a reaction.

The state Attorney General said he spent the drive down from Geneva to Ithaca trying to explain to his

daughters -- Maria and Cara, 15 and Michaela, 12 -- the history and [ethics](#) of Ithaca, where "people like to question authority."

"And then we pulled into town and it was all said for me," Cuomo said, referring to the mass of hydraulic fracturing protesters who lined the streets and surrounded the Women's Community Building, where he spoke.

His "wait and see what the studies say" stance on the gas drilling issue did not seem to satisfy those who swarmed around him afterward, but he did try to appeal to their spirit of activism.

A leader in several major reform movements, including women's suffrage and worker's rights, New York must "raise the progressive beacon once again," Cuomo said.

"You want to know when things are going to change? They are going to change when the people of this state demand change," Cuomo said. "You know this better in Ithaca than anyone: Activism counts. We need to mobilize; we need to make people get engaged."

Most of Cuomo's 15 minutes at the podium were devoted to pushing his reform agenda.

He vowed to clean up the ethical mess in Albany, get the state's fiscal house in order and regain the trust of its people.

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Cuomo said he opposed raising **taxes**, both on property and income, arguing that the state must deal with its spending rather than rely on raising revenue.

"I'm not in favor of raising taxes; I think it's irresponsible," he said.

He would start by downsizing, both internally and throughout the state, and said he is a proponent of municipal mergers and consolidation.

"There are around 1,000 state agencies now -- we think. No one is really sure," Cuomo said. "When you don't even know how many agencies you have, you have too many agencies."

Asked afterward about his vow to push for campaign **finance** reform while still accepting large campaign contributions, Cuomo replied: "I want to reform the campaign finance system. To do that, I have to get elected. To get elected, I have to raise money."



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Attorney General Andrew Cuomo listens to questions about natural gas drilling Thursday after making a campaign speech at the Women's Community Building in Ithaca. The Democrat is running for Governor of New York State. (SIMON WHEELER / Staff Photo)

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