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# DEP secretary blasts back after N.Y. senators attack Pa. drilling

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When the New York State Senate passed a nine-month moratorium on a crucial natural gas drilling technique late Tuesday, legislators there held up Pennsylvania, state regulators and a small Susquehanna County community as models for how not to drill for gas in the Marcellus Shale.

The senators' criticism raised the ire of Pennsylvania Environmental Protection Secretary John 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 sponsor of the New York legislation barring hydraulic fracking, Senator Antoine Thompson, twice visited Dimock Township, in Susquehanna County, and Bradford County in the last eight months to learn from citizens and gas companies about the positive and negative effects of drilling - experiences he cited when he introduced the bill for a vote.

"I think because the state of Pennsylvania was so thirsty to get this development opportunity they did not have enough infrastructure in place, making sure they were inspecting the wells properly, making sure that landowners were protected," Thompson, D-Butte, said Tuesday night.

Despite his opposition to the moratorium, New York State Senator Tom Libous, R-Binghamton, spoke even more critically of Pennsylvania.

"Shame on the state of Pennsylvania," Libous said. "Shame on their Department of Environmental Protection and because they screwed up badly. They didn't keep an eye on those who were drilling. They didn't keep an eye on environmental factors on behalf of the citizens of that state."

Hanger agreed the experience in Dimock was "unacceptable" - the department found that faulty Cabot Oil and Gas Corp. natural gas wells caused methane to contaminate residents' drinking water there. But he described two years of work the department has dedicated to strengthening Pennsylvania's drilling standards and enforcement, including doubling the size of its gas enforcement staff while "New York has added nobody."

"If New York demands to have no impacts from drilling, then they better have a moratorium that extends not just through May 2011, but forever," he said. "You cannot have drilling, even done well, and get zero impact."

When companies have "screwed up, like Cabot screwed up in Dimock," he said, "we've come down on them very, very hard."

Marcellus Shale drilling has been on hold in New York since 2008 when the state's environmental regulatory agency began reviewing the environmental impact of the deep well drilling and updating its permitting requirements. That review is expected to be completed later this year.

When asked if he wished he had the opportunity to watch a neighboring state learn through trial and error - as the New York State Senate's vote positions the Empire State to continue to do - Hanger said, "There are pluses and minuses to each state's approach."

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 **Maxine2** 2 days ago

I'm thinking that John Hanger needs to be replaced as the Pennsylvania Environment Protection Secretary. If someone can't learn from mistakes that were made under his watch...it's time for him to go. He would have already been replaced, if he worked in the private sector. Why should govt held jobs be any different. We need some accountability now. We also need a moratorium Now until safety regulations are in place. I say....."JOHN MUST GO".

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 **JimBarth** 3 days ago


I watched the streaming, live video of the NYS Senate's discussion on the moratorium bill, so I was aware of the comments made by Senator Libous (R-C), and Senator Thompson (D). As a resident of PA, I was quite surprised, yet delighted, that they placed PADEP in the crosshairs. No doubt that PADEP is staffed by many dedicated professionals, but John Hanger is disingenuous at best when he tries to cite a strong record of enforcement by his agency. The simple fact is that this new, unconventional drilling and fracking, has been welcomed with open arms in PA, for the past four approximate years, despite the reality that PADEP was woefully understaffed, and the process was woefully under regulated. PADEP has been scrambling to play catch up, in John Quigley's (head of the DCNR) words, and many, many, citizens have paid a huge price as a result. Now that PADEP is finally acting with appropriate serious response, the agency is still permitting far faster than it adds enforcement staff. I recently saw a letter sent by Sec'y Hanger to Senator Mary Jo White (R-PA), that showed PADEP had issued 1,800 new drilling permits from Jan. 1 through June 18, 2010. It will only continue to increase given the drill baby drill permitting process employed by PADEP. This is a further recipe for disaster.

Laura Legere quotes Sec'y Hanger as saying: "There are plusses and minuses to each state's approach". I would like to hear him tell us the plusses to which he refers. As Ms. Legere points out, PA has proceeded in a "trial and error" fashion. What sane government uses its people as sacrificial animals in a laboratory experiment?

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 **Angela** 3 days ago

I would like to know how John Hanger thinks that he can possibly "blast" back at NY senators who have correctly recognized how bad a job PA's DEP and state government have done in protecting its citizens from the natural gas drilling industry. John, you and your fellow DEP officials don't even have a clue about what is going on out there because there aren't enough of you and you are depending on these companies to turn themselves in. I think they have proved how untrustworthy and irresponsible they are when it comes to protecting the environment and the people of PA. Shame on you to think you could possibly say anything to the NY senators because at least they are smart enough to realize they aren't ready to control the industry (rather than let it control them like we do), have publicly admitted that, and enacted legislation to keep the people of NY safe. The residents of PA truly will continue to be delegated to the job of "guinea pigs" so that PA's government officials can say jobs are on the rise and the economy is looking up... whoop de freaking doo!

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 **Don Williams** 3 days ago

As a native and citizen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and as a long-time environmentalist, I feel that not only have the DEP and SRBC dropped the ball on this one, they're still standing around trying to figure out how to pick it up.

Bravo, NY. Stay the course.

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 **Nepa\_h2o** 2 days ago

NY can buy PA gas. PA can buy NY water. Gas can buy Harrisburg.

4 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **JimBarth** 3 days ago



On a further note, Senator Libous, whom I believe represents a portion of the southern tier of NYS, while articulate, and I believe, correct in his interpretation, and criticism of the PA legislature and executive branches, as well as PADEP, showed full support for the competence of the NYS DEC. The vote for the moratorium was 48-9. He was one of the nine, and his main reason given was his support for the DEC as a professional and competent agency.

That is a joke, since the NYS DEC has approximately 16 enforcement inspectors for the entire state of NY. The NYS DEC does not even have a budget that can support travel by any of its representatives (the NYS commissioner at the Delaware River Basin Commission has missed at least the past two public meetings, and I participated in a panel in Katonah, NY in which the DEC rep cancelled for that same reason, no money for travel). While it is correct to point a finger at PADEP, it is laughable that it is his finger.

Senator Thompson (NYS), also made interesting points regarding the legislature's responsibility to ensure that local governments have the authority to protect their citizens, noting that virtually all power has been taken away from the localities, and given to the state. The counties and townships suffer as a result. He felt the moratorium would give some time for the legislature to investigate this outrageous imbalance.

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**John Peterson** 2 days ago

PA took the money from the gas companies, so all they can and will do is cave in to them, PA does not care about it people, Harrisburg just wants us to pay our taxes and let them all get RICH !

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