

Hydraulic Fracturing Moratorium Nears End

Cuomo in Middle of Tug of War

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Last [Updated](#): Jun 26, 2011

Created: Jun 26, 2011

NEW YORK—New Yorkers opposed to hydraulic fracturing, the method of obtaining [natural gas](#) from underground deposits in shale that entails forcing toxins into the ground, are ramping up efforts to get Gov. Andrew Cuomo on their side.

Hundreds attended a protest in Foley Square Saturday afternoon, calling on the governor to ban hydraulic fracturing, or hydrofracking. They believe the extraction method poses a serious risk to New York City's drinking water supply.

Last year, former Gov. David Paterson placed a moratorium on high-pressure horizontal fracking that will expire in July 2011. The moratorium was intended to give the Department of Environmental Conservation time to further study the risks of contaminating upstate reservoirs near the shale.

Opponents and proponents of fracking have battled throughout the course of the moratorium, and long before it, but the battle has now reached a fevered pitch. A [Marist poll](#) released on May 17 shows 41 percent of New Yorkers are against fracking, 38 percent support it, and 21 percent are unsure.

Cuomo is in the middle of the raging debate. He has indicated sympathy with fracking proponents but remains noncommittal.

In February, Cuomo considered lifting the moratorium to reap the economic rewards of the industry and create jobs. On May 18, however, after a well in Bradford County, Pa., had [leaked](#) contaminated water for two days, polluting a creek and leading to the evacuation of neighboring homes, he ordered an expanded environmental review.

No protest has been without some Pennsylvania residents holding up jugs of contaminated water from their taps or telling tales of big oil companies asking them to settle out of court and not talk to the press.

“Concern is focused on the gas company's [investment](#),” declared Jeremiah Compton Gee, a doctorate candidate at Penn State [University](#), whose hometown of Wellsboro's claim to fame is contaminated ground water from a nearby oil well. “What do you plan on doing when a gallon of water costs more than a gallon of gas?” asked Gee.

In an editorial published in the [New York Post](#) last week, Lawrence Mone, president of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, urged Cuomo to lift the moratorium right away.

The institute released a report, compiled by Tim Considine, an energy economist at the University of Wyoming, and Robert Watson, chairman of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Oil and Gas Technical Advisory Board, which outlined the economic benefits of hydrofracking.

“By 2015, the state could enjoy \$1.7 billion in added economic activity, 16,000 more jobs, and \$214 million in extra tax revenue if its natural gas reserves were developed. From 2011 to 2020, New York could gain \$11.4 billion in economic output, 90,000 to 108,000 new jobs, and \$1.4 billion in tax revenues,” summarized Mone in his editorial.

“While New York 'studies' the issue, Pennsylvania and other states are reaping the rewards,” he wrote.

Mone did not contest that leaks and contamination have occurred but noted that a tally of the Department of Environmental Protection incident reports has shown that “the cost of the environmental impacts caused by natural-gas drilling is far smaller than the economic benefits that drilling can provide.”

Many Republicans agree with Mone, and the issue has been polarized along partisan lines.

Democratic state Sen. Tony Avella introduced Bill 4220 to ban fracking. Of the 62 state senators, 20 have joined Avella as co-sponsors of the bill. Avella also sponsored a wastewater bill to ensure stringent regulations on disposing of the chemical solution used in fracking should the ban bill fail in the Legislature. Twenty-eight state senators have joined Avella as co-sponsors of this bill.

On June 6, the state Assembly approved a bill that would prohibit issuance of any new permits for drilling until June 1, 2012, but the measure has yet to gain support in the state Senate.

“I think [fracking will be stopped] regardless of what legislation does,” said Jim Dean, chairman of the grassroots organization Democracy for America. He noted that while some landowners are eager to lease their land on the shale to oil companies, many are also reluctant and are pressured by their neighbors not to do so.

Josh Fox, director of “Gasland,” the documentary touted by the activist community as the most comprehensive and compelling argument against fracking, called Cuomo from the protest on Saturday. He held up his [cell phone](#) to the crowd, urging them to leave a raucous, yet polite message asking the governor to ban fracking.

Fox announced “call Cuomo Mondays,” as well as a protest to be held at noon on Monday, June 27, in front of the governor's office on Third Avenue in a campaign of increasing pressure as the moratorium deadline draws near.

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“This is not some kind of fringe protest,” Fox reminded the crowd. “We are the majority.”