

IOGA of NY Urges Lawmakers to 'Do No Harm'

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From IOGA of NY:

As the Legislature is preparing a return to session, lawmakers should keep in mind the primary lessons learned by medical students: "First, Do No Harm."

This primary healthcare lesson reminding future health care professionals to consider the possible harm that intervention might cause is applicable as the Legislature convenes in extraordinary session Wednesday. In this case, they should do no harm by rejecting "moratorium" bills pending in both houses of the Legislature.

While two competing bills have not made it to the Senate or Assembly floors, the industry is concerned that elevated rhetoric and scare tactics from opponents will shift lawmakers' focus from the facts surrounding natural gas exploration in New York.

"We strongly believe that New York's existing regulations, combined with the pending DEC rule changes, will provide more than adequate protection to New York's natural resources," said Brad Gill, executive director of IOGA of NY. "Further delays are not needed and would certainly not result in greater protections. Public policy and lawmaking should be deliberated with facts in hand and cool heads. Action premised on hysterical falsehoods risks causing more harm than good."

One bill, sponsored by Sen. Antoine Thompson (D-Buffalo) and Assemblyman Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst), would place an immediate moratorium on new natural gas drilling permits in New York. As written, the bill would ban all hydraulic fracturing in the state, even on residential water wells and low-volume natural gas wells. Another bill, sponsored by Assemblyman Steven Englebright (D-Setauket) and Senator Joseph Addabbo (D-Howard Beach), would halt natural gas exploration using hydraulic fracturing until completion of a study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is revising regulations for exploration in the Marcellus Shale – a vast natural gas reserve underneath parts of five eastern states. The DEC review began more than two years ago and is expected to be complete and released in late summer or early fall.

With adequate regulations in place, New York can expect to see tremendous economic impacts for decades to come. According to a new study by the American Petroleum Institute, natural gas production in the Marcellus Shale could create 280,000 jobs and add \$6 billion in tax revenues to local, state and federal governments over the next 10 years. In 2009 alone, natural gas production in the Marcellus yielded 57,000 new jobs in Pennsylvania and West Virginia primarily, the study showed. The study also concluded that delays in New York have resulted in "\$11 billion in lost economic output."

“Environmental protection and expanded natural gas exploration is not an either-or issue,” Gill said. “The two goals can co-exist. The industry has an excellent record of success in New York. Our commitment to excellence will remain strong as the Marcellus Shale is explored.”