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## Jobs New York needs

By KAREN MOREAU

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Just a three-hour drive from New York City, the economic devastation is some thing out of "Grapes of Wrath." Across the Southern Tier, the gray scenes of the Great Depression come to life in the rusted and idled farm equipment and dilapidated barns that dot the countryside. In the faces of the hardscrabble people who have hung on to the land, you see hopelessness. Their children have never known prosperity.

I first visited the farmers of Tioga County a decade ago as counsel for agriculture to the state Senate. I saw farms in foreclosure thanks to a brutal combination of high property taxes, ever-stricter environmental regulation, high energy costs and low milk prices.

Now, for the first time in decades, there's hope: Recent innovation in 50-year-old techniques of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") have turned the Marcellus Shale deposits beneath our state's poorest counties into potentially one of the most productive natural-gas fields in the world.

Except that then-Gov. David Paterson bowed to environmental extremists by delaying any fracking in New York for three years -- and the same forces are pushing Gov. Cuomo to extend the ban indefinitely.

You only have to drive across Route 17 from dying Lowman, NY, into bustling Sayre, Pa., to witness the economic miracle being denied to some of the poorest New Yorkers.

My guide, New York farmer Hank Ferris, points out the water trucks filling up at the hydrant near the swollen Susquehanna River. "I'm taking a job driving a water truck. I shut down my barn this year, the costs just got too high," he explained. "The \$18 an hour with benefits will get me through until hopefully things improve in New York."

In Pennsylvania, gleaming white pickups belonging to Chesapeake Energy workers are everywhere. New restaurants, stores and hotels have been built to accommodate them.

And down in the river valley, you see beautiful dairy farms with new barns and graveled barnyards providing storage for gas pipes and equipment. Stone quarries are humming to supply materials for access roads and well pads.

Blue-collar workers left out in the cold by New York's policies are finding work in Pennsylvania as mechanics, truck drivers and construction workers. Keystone State landowners are investing cash from gas leasing in farms, businesses and equipment -- creating more jobs.

Robert Powelson, who chairs the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, told his state House of Representatives: "I actually like The New York Times taking shots at us -- because I often say, 'Thank you, New York, for your drilling moratorium. All that investment here in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.' "

Or, as the editor of the Wheeling, W.Va., paper The Intelligencer writes of an anti-fracking rally in Albany, "Irrational claims such as those popular in New York -- right down to warnings gas wells may cause earthquakes -- are not unique to New York. Fortunately, reasonable minds in our states are rejecting hysteria."

Look for anti-fracking green groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council to exploit the recent spill of fracking fluid in Pennsylvania, caused by a cracked well casing. They're already exploiting children ("deputized" as "Water Rangers") in their radio ads, frightening New Yorkers into supporting their agenda.

With its \$100 million a year in revenues, the NRDC plainly couldn't care less about the real cases of human despair caused by the economic decline of Upstate.

As with any complex technological process, accidents can never be ruled out; human error will always be with us. But the risks from fracking are extremely low. Over 1.1 million wells have been fracked in the United States since 1949, with not a single documented case of contamination to groundwater. The benefits to New Yorkers far outweigh the risks.

Why haven't the energy companies invested in a media counterattack? Probably because it's easier to make the huge investment in drilling in states less hostile to business, and less willing to believe any absurd charge that comes with a green label.

Will Gov. Cuomo stand up to the nonsense? As the Pennsylvania experience shows, he can allow fracking and still insist on reasonable oversight from Department of Environmental Conservation, issuing a clear set of requirements for the industry to address legitimate environmental impacts with appropriate investment and new technologies for fracking and wastewater containment.

Cuomo can deliver on his promise to make New York economically competitive again, creating much-needed jobs in upstate New York and guaranteeing low cost energy for the future. Or he can he turn his back on the pauperized upstaters whose voices are drowned out by the powerful environmental lobby that dines on caviar at its Manhattan fund-raisers.

*Karen Bulich Moreau is president of the Foundation for Land and Liberty, a nonprofit focusing on land use and economic liberty.*

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