

Paterson: NY can't allow hydrofracking because it can't pay for the oversight

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Glenn Coin / The Post-Standard

Gov. David Paterson said last week the state will “not risk public safety or water quality” by allowing the underground drilling technique know as high-volume hydrofracking.

“At this point, I would say that the hydrofracking opponents have raised enough of an argument to thwart us going forward at this time,” Paterson said in an interview Wednesday with WAMC-FM radio in Albany.

Paterson’s spokeswoman said Friday that the state’s deficit makes it impossible to have enough Department of Environmental Conservation employees to adequately oversee the drilling.

“The state is in the midst of an unprecedented economic crisis and it is necessary for state agencies to focus available resources on core mission functions,” spokeswoman Jessica Bassett said, in an e-mail. “Without additional staff, DEC would not assure that this type of drilling could be done safely.”

The DEC would lose 209 positions under a budget-cutting plan by Paterson, on top of 260 lost to early retirement incentives, according to a memo from DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis. Paterson fired Grannis after the memo was leaked last month.

Hydrofracking involves high-pressure injection of millions of gallons of chemical-laced water into a well to crack rock and release natural gas. Opponents fear it could endanger drinking water, but the industry says it has been done safely for decades and has the potential to make the United States a world leader in natural gas production.

The DEC is conducting a study of hydrofracking, but has given no date for the completion of that study. The federal Environmental Protection Agency also is conducting a study.

The state Senate has adopted a bill banning any hydrofracking until at least mid-May. The Assembly has not voted yet. Bassett said if both houses passed the bill, Paterson would review it.

Paterson’s term ends Dec. 31. The governor-elect, Andrew Cuomo, has not taken a stand on hydrofracking.

“I don’t think we have enough facts to make a decision,” he told The Post-Standard last month. “The DEC is

supposed to do a report. EPA is going to do a report. Let's get the facts and then we'll decide."

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