



Updated: Fri., May. 20, 2011, 4:27 AM

Phony fears on fracking

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Last Updated: 4:27 AM, May 20, 2011

Posted: 10:46 PM, May 19, 2011

Opponents of gas exploration have time and again raised the ghastly specter of chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing (or fracking) contaminating water supplies. The process uses water, sand and chemicals injected under high pressure to break dense rock to release trapped oil and gas. But these "fracking" fears are false.

Most recently, Duke University researchers purportedly found trace methane gas in well water near gas wells in the Marcellus Shale region. Yet naturally occurring trace methane is found in well water nationwide. The study is meaningless, because it presents no baseline data on methane in well water, and also fails to distinguish between methane that's naturally present in well water and manmade methane contamination.

Supporters of gas exploration agree that the state must take all necessary precautions to ensure that drinking water in the Southern Tier remains safe and plentiful. Contrary to critics' suggestions, New York City's watershed, like those of our state's other major cities, is protected and off-limits to natural-gas exploration.

It recently came out that \$1 billion in state pension funds is invested in companies involved in natural-gas exploration. State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli says he's been urging the companies to make their operations environmentally friendly. Apparently, he understands that gas exploration is not necessarily a threat to water quality.

The additives used in "fracking" fluid are well known. Last summer, nine drilling companies provided the US Environmental Protection Agency with detailed information on those chemicals.

We know that 99.5 percent of fracking fluid is water and sand. The rest is comprised of commonly used compounds -- many of them chemicals used in water treatment, pharmaceuticals and automotive care.

Mark Ruffalo, an actor and leader of the movement against gas exploration, seems oblivious to the fact that many of the fracking chemicals are found in the cosmetics and makeup removers used in the film industry. Many others are found in table salt, lemon juice, disinfectants, hand soap, detergents, antiperspirants and processed foods -- all things no one thinks twice about flushing into the wastewater stream.

Unlike the 19th century Luddites, who fought to preserve the livelihood of textile workers displaced by mechanical looms, the anti-fracking crowd opposes job creation, economic expansion and cleaner energy. They are peddling hysterical nonsense that will result in more outmigration of New Yorkers from upstate communities.

Natural-gas exploration is an economic necessity, both for the Southern Tier and for reducing our dependence on higher priced, out-of-state natural gas supplies. Opposing gas exploration without any credible evidence of danger to our water supply isn't in the best interest of our economy.

Creating upward of 20,000 good-paying jobs in upstate New York and generating millions of dollars in taxes and fees for our state treasury would reduce future deficits and ensure the success of Gov. Cuomo's approach to leaner, smarter government -- and guarantees state pensioners will earn a return on DiNapoli's wise investment of public funds.

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