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HIGH STANDARDS FOR GAS DRILLING IN N.Y. ALREADY EXIST

GREGORY H. **SOVAS**

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In response to Fred LeBrun's April 18 column, "If there's drilling, set bar high," it's crucial to remember that the bar is already set high for natural gas drilling in New York.

As former director of the state Department of Environmental Conservation's Division of Mineral Resources for 22 years, I can tell you that thousands of wells have been drilled in the state since the 1980s. Because of stringent casing and cementing requirements for all wells drilled and even more stringent requirements for wells in aquifer areas, there has been only one minor incident in the drilling of a natural gas well affecting the fresh waters of the state. It was resolved in a few hours and was so minor that I didn't even recall it until it was brought to my attention.

Hydraulic fracturing has been utilized in New York for more than 60 years. We have never had a problem. The process is proven, and refinements and technologic improvements have made exploration and development in the Marcellus and other shales economically viable. At the same time, advances in horizontal drilling and drilling multiple wells from one location have reduced the environmental impact.

The DEC and particularly the Division of Mineral Resources, which has a track record as a stringent regulator, did the right thing by undertaking the Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement. The long-term and very public study is nearing completion. To my knowledge, there has been no evidence presented that would suggest that drilling in proximity to water supply reservoirs is any different from drilling in primary or secondary aquifer areas.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has studied the impacts of hydrofracturing, testified before Congress and made several high-level statements about its nonexistent impact on fresh water supplies. To suggest that we wait for EPA to complete another study before we proceed with natural gas extraction in the Marcellus is ridiculous.

Let Mr. LeBrun in his retirement continue to canoe down the Hudson while ignoring the need for safe, environmentally clean natural gas, jobs for New Yorkers, and needed revenue to landowners in depressed areas who want to keep their farms. All can be accomplished with no environmental compromises. The bar is already set high; setting it out of reach is unreasonable.

Gregory H. **Sovas** is president of XRM, a Ballston Lake firm that does environmental consulting in mining and oil and gas matters. He also is a principal and director of Lake Country FracWater Specialists, a firm that can treat hydrofracing water. His e-mail address is xrm@nycap.rr.com.

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