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## Staff cuts likely to impact DEC services

By Nick Reisman • [nreisman@gannett.com](mailto:nreisman@gannett.com)  
November 21, 2010, 8:20 pm

ALBANY -- Former state Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Alexander "Pete" Grannis on Thursday criticized the process the governor's office used for cutting staff as a "shell game" with little thought given to the impact of the cuts.

His successor at the agency, meanwhile, said the layoffs would impact services across the state, but are necessary as the state makes needed spending cuts.

"Decisions were made by people who had never worked in the agency," Grannis told the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee during a hearing in Albany.

Grannis, a former Democratic assemblyman from Manhattan and the DEC chief for three years, was fired in October after an internal unsigned memo critical of the proposed layoffs at the agency was leaked.

Grannis denies he was the source of the leaked memo.

Gov. David Paterson's office instructed the DEC to cut 209 workers by the end of the year.

The DEC had 3,775 full-time employees in April 2008. If the staff cuts are approved, it will have lost 849 full-time employees since then.

State officials, environmental advocates and lawmakers said they fear reducing the size of the agency will have a wide-ranging impact on the DEC's ability to provide oversight at environmentally sensitive areas of the state, including the Indian Point nuclear power plant in Westchester County, the potential drilling for natural gas in the Southern Tier region and the DEC's participation in the federal government's Superfund program.

The sudden dismissal of Grannis came as a shock to members of the environmental community, many of whom remain concerned that the state doesn't have the resources to adequately study the effects of drilling for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale region

of the Southern Tier.

Energy companies remain concerned that not having a fully staffed DEC would delay the permitting process for drilling rights in the shale.

"Proposed staff reductions at DEC simply cannot be allowed to occur, because additional loss of regulators will have an adverse effect on the economy, our reputation as an industry, and our acceptance," testified John Holko, president of Lenape Resources and a board member of the Independent Oil and Gas Association of New York.

Grannis told the committee that a preliminary report studying the issue, due out in May, would be completed correctly.

"In this case we have the advantage of being able to say we're not going to move ahead until we've got it right," Grannis said.

Grannis' replacement, Acting Commissioner Peter Iwanowicz, told the committee that staff cuts would impact regulatory oversight around the state and services, but they were necessary given the state's fiscal woes.

"It is important for us to keep in mind that our decisions going forward must be made in the context of the state's overall financial condition," Iwanowicz said.

Iwanowicz also said the completion of the drilling study would not be impacted by the layoffs.

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But if natural gas drilling is approved by the state, the agency would need more resources to monitor the process and issue permits.

"We'll be able to issue permits and monitor the drilling with the amount of resources we have," Iwanowicz said.

"We'd like to have more resources and staff to be able to do that. If we don't, then we anticipate less drilling will happen."

But environmentalists testifying at the hearing said a fully staffed DEC is needed for more oversight of the potentially hazardous drilling.

"I don't see how we can possibly move forward on this until there's at least some enforcement resources to do it," said Richard Schrader, the legislative director of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

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