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March 30, 2011

The Promise and Risks of Natural Gas

To the Editor:

Re "Natural Gas and Clean Water" (editorial, March 23):

In this time of energy uncertainty, it is essential that New York and the country not forgo the opportunity presented by natural gas from shale. It is the cleanest of the fossil fuels, and an affordable and abundant domestic resource. Given the incredible uncertainty in the oil-rich Middle East (and our dependence on imported oil), and the tragedy in Japan (and our dependence on aging nuclear plants), we cannot close that door.

That said, the industry has not helped itself with its inadequate performance standards, transparency and communication. Some of the best geoscientists in the world are in our top-rated research universities and institutions. They can provide an independent analysis supported by rigorous field testing.

It is essential that the industry and the New York State government collaborate to provide the financial resources and regulatory environment that will ensure that natural gas can be produced in an environmentally safe manner.

With rigorous standards and best available technology, we can get it right. We can fuel an economic recovery, employ thousands, preserve the land and water resources, improve the air and lessen our dependence on unstable regions, while providing for a fundamentally sound energy policy.

ROBERT B. CATELL

New York, March 24, 2011

The writer is chairman of the advisory board of the Advanced Energy Research and Technology Center at Stony Brook University.

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To the Editor:

Your editorial "Natural Gas and Clean Water" is on target, but lacks a solid rationale for banning hydraulic fracturing in two of New York's watersheds but not all. The implication that a high

population should exclude an area from risks associated with new energy development is poor policy, since it is those very millions who represent the demand for more energy.

Even your urban readers might agree that it would be difficult to justify a policy in which rural New Yorkers assume all the risks of new energy development in order to meet the energy demands of population centers like New York City.

STEPHANIE WEISS

Clayton, N.Y., March 24, 2011

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To the Editor:

You argue that the issue is not whether the country should be drilling for natural gas, but rather whether it can be done safely using hydraulic fracturing. We agree, but we also believe that more than one million wells that have been drilled using hydraulic fracturing over the past six decades offer an emphatic answer to that question. Yes, it can.

Under state regulation, which we support, hydraulic fracturing can continue to provide American consumers with the clean-burning natural gas they will need for decades to come. And it can continue doing so without harming drinking water supplies. Our environment is important, and that's why we support vigorous state regulation and disclosure of the materials used in fracturing.

But we cannot let unfounded fears about hydraulic fracturing deprive us of the domestic natural gas production that would be lost if hydraulic fracturing were to be banned or severely restricted — particularly in light of recent developments in Japan and the Middle East. Nor can we let exaggerated suspicions deprive the people of New York, Pennsylvania and other states of the hundreds of thousands of jobs that drilling in the Marcellus Shale is expected to generate.

MIKE DOYLE

Executive Director

New York State Petroleum Council

Albany, March 24, 2011

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To the Editor:

The Maryland House of Delegates recently passed what would be the country's strictest law regulating hydraulic fracturing for natural gas. The bill needs Senate approval, and the governor has expressed his support.

The comprehensive [bill](#) requires a scientific finding that hydraulic fracturing is not harmful to humans or the environment before any drilling takes place. It sets a reasonable time frame (two years) for completion of a state study; the federal Environmental Protection Agency is also studying the issue.

It takes time to determine whether an invasive process with the potential to destroy drinking water resources is not only profitable for industry and the large landowners it relies on but also safe. Wouldn't it be foolish to do it any other way?

PAUL ROBERTS

Friendsville, Md., March 24, 2011