

## News

### **Bonacic, NYC in face-off over gas-drilling ban Senator says city should buy landowners' drilling rights**

By Steve Israel

Times Herald-Record

February 18, 2010 2:00 AM

If New York City wants to ban gas drilling in its vast watershed — and it does — it should pay those who want to lease their land to gas companies, says state Sen. John Bonacic, R-C-Mount Hope.

For months, the city and environmental groups have called for a ban on natural gas drilling in the watershed, a small portion of which sits in Sullivan County.

Drilling there would pollute the city's unfiltered drinking water, New York City politicians such as Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the city's Department of Environmental Protection say.

But the state has resisted the calls for a ban in its proposal for new regulations in the gas-rich Marcellus shale. Since 70 percent of the land in the watershed is privately owned, a ban would be illegal, state Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis has said.

Now, Bonacic, who says drilling is safe, is calling the bluff of the city — and environmental groups, who hope a watershed ban would mean a drilling ban throughout the state.

"Let them buy the development rights," he says. "For those landowners who want to sell their gas rights, let the city pay the same market rate to keep the land undeveloped. We buy agricultural development rights for tracts of land we want to preserve. Let those who oppose the lawful exploration and extraction of gas in the Catskills (do the same)."

While the city's DEP points out that it has already invested \$541 million to buy watershed land, it did not directly address Bonacic's proposal, except to reiterate the "unacceptable threats" of drilling to drinking water.

"We look forward to continuing a dialogue with elected officials and all stakeholders to protect the watershed during this process," said a statement by Environmental Protection Commissioner Cas Holloway.

But Bonacic, born and raised in Manhattan, says the call for a ban on watershed drilling is one more example of the city's insensitivity to the rights of upstaters.

"If New York City can stop development of energy sources in the Catskills," he said, "they can diminish the value of people's land without compensation."

sisrael@th-record.com

### **GAS DRILLING TALK ON SATURDAY**

Mayor Calvin Tillman of DISH, Texas will speak about the negative affects of gas drilling on his town at a public health and gas drilling panel discussion 4 p.m., Saturday, at the Delaware Youth Center, Callicoon.