



The League of Women Voters of New York State
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THE LEAGUE
OF WOMEN VOTERS
of New York State

June 16, 2011

Mr. Thomas Congdon
Assistant Secretary for Energy and the Environment
State Capitol
Executive Chamber, Room 245
Albany, NY 12224

Robert Rosenthal, Esq.
Assistant Counsel for the Governor
State Capitol
Executive Chamber, Room 244
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Mr. Congdon and Mr. Rosenthal:

The LWVNY appreciates the opportunity we had to speak with you about the League's concern with the state's energy policy. For the record, we believe there is a need to carefully consider all possible effects and use caution in setting policy regarding the full life cycle of extracting reserves of natural gas from NY's shale formations using high volume, slick-water horizontal hydraulic fracturing and other unconventional techniques.

As the state moves forward, we believe it is essential to consider the long-term impact of drilling on our social, health, environmental, and economic environments. Without such consideration, there is a danger that moving forward with drilling will result in a massive transfer of risk from those who mine the oil to the state's citizens.

It appears that these cumulative impacts have not been thoroughly studied in areas where unconventional shale gas development has already taken place, although stories of the transfer of risk and damage to citizens are surfacing. While extensive research on the cumulative impact of drilling is not currently available, results of a number of studies are emerging and more are presently being conducted by Cornell University researchers and others who recognize the lack of information on the cumulative impacts. In addition, as you know, the EPA is conducting a study of the effects of unconventional drilling on finite water resources.

As we noted in letter to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation previously forwarded to you, on October 25, 2010, the University of Buffalo announced at <http://www.buffalo.edu/news/11885> that researchers have found hydraulic fracturing also causes uranium that is naturally trapped inside Marcellus shale to be released, raising additional environmental concerns.

This research, spearheaded by Assistant Professor Tracy Bank, was presented at the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America in Denver on November 2, 2010. The article, quoting Bank, states, “Marcellus shale naturally traps metals such as uranium and at higher levels than usually found naturally, but lower than manmade contamination levels.” Bank and her colleagues addressed the question of whether drilling and pumping millions of gallons of water into underground rocks would force the uranium into the soluble phase and mobilize it. They further investigated whether uranium would show up in groundwater. Bank and her colleagues “found that uranium and the hydrocarbons [read ‘natural gas’] are in the same physical space;” “We found that that they are not just physically—but also chemically—bound.” The article addresses the study methodology which mapped precise locations of uranium; it also notes that when “the millions of gallons of water used in hydraulic fracturing come back to the surface, it could contain uranium contaminants, potentially polluting streams and other ecosystems and generating hazardous waste.” Bank goes on to state, “Even though at these levels, uranium is not a radioactive risk, it is still a toxic, deadly metal.”

Local governments are also in the process of studying the impacts of this process on their people and resources. The Tompkins County Council of Governments has a particularly comprehensive analysis and compilation of documents on their website: [http://www.tompkins-co.org/tccog/Gas Drilling/Focus Groups/Index Focus Groups.html](http://www.tompkins-co.org/tccog/Gas_Drilling/Focus_Groups/Index_Focus_Groups.html). It has studied the effect of drilling on land values, property assessment, the tax base, and mortgage financing as well as public infrastructure, health and environment. It points out several major problems that are not addressed by the current SGEIS. We recommend that the DEC be asked to address all of these issues in the SGEIS.

The health effects of unconventional gas drilling are of considerable concern. We recommend that you review the testimony presented by physicians and scientists at the May 26, 2011 Public Hearing on the Health Impacts of Hydraulic Fracturing Techniques held by the Assembly Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation and the Assembly Standing Committee on Health.

Based on the foregoing, we urge that New York lead the nation by evaluating the results of these studies before issuing any permits for high volume, slick-water horizontal hydraulic fracturing so that we can avoid some of the major, and often irreversible, mistakes made elsewhere. The well-being of our state, our nation and our planet requires nothing less.

When we met with you we also discussed the future of renewable energy in New York which the League supports. We trust that the 2013 State Energy Plan will focus on renewable sources of energy as superior ways for NYS to grow its economy, making it vibrant and sustainable without the negatives associated with natural gas. In particular, we hope the Cuomo administration will explore ways to make our state a national leader in the research, development, and manufacture

of renewable energy resources as well as energy conservation and energy efficiency. New York has the universities and people to support this activity.

Please let us know how we may help facilitate implementation of renewable energy throughout the state. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Betsey B. Swan
President, LWVNYS

Elisabeth N. Radow
Chair, Committee on Hydraulic Fracturing

Encl.: *LWVNYS testimony submitted on June 2, 2011 to the Assembly Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation and Assembly Standing Committee on Health*