

GAS DRILLING RESOLUTION for Tompkins County Legislature, May 18, 2010

Calling on the Governor and the Legislature of the State of New York to Ban Hydrofracking Pending Further Independent Scientific Assessments to Determine the Risks, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and Social and Economic Costs Associated With Hydrofracking

WHEREAS, recent disasters in West Virginia's coal mines and at the drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico highlight the dangers inherent in extractive mining, with particular concern about the possible role of methane (the main component in natural gas) in these events, and

WHEREAS, even before these incidents, residents of New York State have raised significant concerns about the safety of high volume, slickwater hydrofracking with horizontal drilling, as proposed for the Marcellus Shale and in the future, the Utica Shale, and

WHEREAS, New Yorkers' concerns include questions about the ability of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, with its current staffing levels and its proposed regulations, to protect our natural resources and prevent permanent damage to our environment, and

WHEREAS, the Tompkins County Legislature has passed resolutions stating its concerns about gas drilling on December 3, 2008, May 19, 2009, and December 15, 2009, and

WHEREAS, based on experience in other states where this drilling has been underway for years, the concerns include but are not limited to:

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air pollution (ground level ozone and smog) at and near drilling sites;

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threats to groundwater and surface water supplies from accidents on the surface, as well as subsurface failures of casings and the hydrofracking process itself;

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depletion and degradation of New York's lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands;

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long-term consequences from infusion of potentially toxic chemicals into the ground;

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dangers from drill cuttings and flowback water, which may be unsuitable and unsafe for disposal in New York's landfills and wastewater treatment plants;

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deleterious effects of noise and light from 24/7 drilling on the natural habitat of our region and our residents' health and quality of life;

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significant damage to roads and bridges, resulting in loss of mobility and economic activity even if drilling companies eventually rebuild the damaged infrastructure;

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fragmentation of our landscape, with loss of vital habitat for wildlife and significant increase in "edge" habitats which stimulate growth of invasive species;

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damage to existing economic sectors, including agriculture, hunting and fishing, tourism, and higher education;

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social disruption, including increase in crime rates and demand for emergency medical services, and greater disparity between high- and low-income households;

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economic costs to residents and local governments, including higher inflation, increased pressure on housing and consequent homelessness, and precipitous drop in property values; and

WHEREAS, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007), methane is 72

times more potent than carbon dioxide in heating the planet over a 20-year time horizon.

Therefore when all greenhouse gas emissions are calculated, including emissions from the drilling activity and from the distribution process such as leaks in pipelines, natural gas is not a “cleaner” fuel than other fossil fuels and in fact it might be far more damaging in terms of climate change than coal; and

WHEREAS, rigorous scientific investigations of these issues are just beginning, including a study of the full life-cycle emissions of shale gas (R. Howarth, Cornell University), the social and economic costs and benefits of the industry (S. Christopherson, Cornell University), and the EPA's study of potential relationships between hydraulic fracturing and water resources; and

WHEREAS, the Council of Scientific Society Presidents, representing 1.4 million scientists in more than 150 scientific disciplines, went on record on May 4, 2010 calling for adequate scientific analysis before implementing untested energy “solutions,” using corn ethanol as an example, and specifically stating with respect to the Marcellus Shale: “Prior, thorough science-based studies are required to evaluate the impact of massive shale development on rural land uses, water supply and quality, and full-life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions;”and

WHEREAS, New York State has acknowledged the dangerous potential for negative impacts with its determination that, at the very least, individual permits will be required for any wells in the New York City and Syracuse watersheds, and

WHEREAS, New York State has so far not committed itself to a course of action with respect to shale gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale or the Utica Shale, and it could continue to use the “precautionary principle” to guide policy on this issue, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Tompkins County Legislature hereby urges New York State to ban hydrofracking operations pending further independent scientific assessments, including the EPA study, research on the life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions of shale gas, and the social and economic impacts of the industry; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the Tompkins County Legislature hereby supports passage of A.10490/S.7592

(Englebright/ Addabbo, attached) titled “An act to establish a moratorium upon conducting hydraulic fracturing pending the issuance of a report thereon by the federal Environmental Protection Agency”; and be it further

RESOLVED, that at the very least, the same standards should be applied to all of New York State that the DEC has indicated it will apply to the New York City and Syracuse watersheds, by requiring individual environmental assessments for each individual well, and be it further

RESOLVED, that copies of this resolution will be sent to Governor David A. Paterson, Congressman Michael Arcuri, Congressman Maurice Hinchey, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, Senate Leader John Sampson, NYS Health Commissioner Richard Daines, DEC Commissioner Peter Grannis, NYS Dept. of Agriculture & Markets Commissioner Patrick Hooker, the NYS Association of Counties, State Senators James Seward, George Winner, Michael Nozzolio, Antoine Thompson, Joseph Addabbo, Darrel Aubertine, and George Maziarz; Assemblymembers Barbara Lifton, Kevin Cahill, Steve Englebright, Robert Sweeney, and James Brennan; and Attorney General Andrew Cuomo.