



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

JACK M. MARTINS October 24, 2011

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Let's Look Before We Leap

When I first heard about hydro-fracking a few years back, I thought it was going to be played on my children's X-box and cost me at least \$100. While I happily discovered it wasn't another video game, what I did learn gave me cause for concern.

Hydro-fracking is short for hydraulic fracturing, a unique process that allows us to collect natural gas from shale (rock) formations deep below the earth's surface. Typically a company will drill a very deep hole, anywhere between 5,000 to 20,000 feet. They then pump millions of gallons of fluid into the rock formation itself, creating great pressure which ultimately fractures the rock and releases the trapped gas. Given that the United States sits on trillions of cubic feet of natural gas, this technology initially seemed to be an answer to our country's perpetual energy crisis.

The good news is that New York has bountiful bedrock formations known as the Marcellus and Utica Shales. If these areas are opened to hydro-fracking, it will result in thousands of new jobs in areas that desperately need them. It will also produce a huge economic windfall for our state. Clearly, as we grapple with budget shortfalls, any boost should be and will be explored.

The bad news is there are a number of very real concerns about the safety and environmental impact of the process. I won't go into all of them, but the greatest of these relates to the liquid slurry that is pumped into the ground. It is a mixture of chemicals that could penetrate the underground water supplies of nearby communities, as well as the New York City and Syracuse watersheds. There are also questions as to how the chemical waste is stored and transported, all raising the specter of significant ecological damage.

Unfortunately, there have been instances in other states where some of these problems have already been born out. As you can imagine, experts on both sides argue the legitimacy of these claims. That's probably why the federal government's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has finally commissioned a national study of the environmental and public health effects of hydro-fracking. We're sure to hear about it as the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) begins public hearings in the coming month. The closest takes place on November 30, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. and then from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers Street in New York City.

As it stands, it is clear that we should hold off on hydro-fracking in New York State, at least until we are certain that these concerns have been addressed. As much as I appreciate its economic impact, I simply feel there is too much conflicting information for us to safely make a proper decision at this time. We should not let a rush for potential financial stability cloud our judgment or override the safety of our residents. The gas is going nowhere. It should remain in the rock until such time that we can guarantee safety.

Simply put, relatively short-term economic benefit cannot be permitted to trump long term ecological concerns. We have an intergenerational responsibility to our children to ensure that decisions we make do not negatively impact the environment, especially when it involves the viability of our drinking water. When these concerns are properly addressed, then sure, we can certainly use the jobs and economic benefit that hydro-fracking provides.

But until then, it bears repeating, the gas is going nowhere.

However you feel, I urge you to get involved. You can visit

www.dec.ny.gov/energy/75370.html to learn more or submit comments at

<http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/76838.html> until December 12, 2011.