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Seven Hundred Advocates Rally in Albany to Support Natural Gas Exploration

Landowners send message to lawmakers to move forward and allow safe exploration to commence.

ALBANY, NY – Landowner coalitions from New York’s Southern Tier and Catskills representing 23 landowner groups and 17,500 families held a rally and news conference near the Capitol in Albany today. These volunteer advocates were here in support of safe natural gas exploration and to debunk the misrepresentations being spread by obstructionist groups.

Twelve busloads of landowners, business leaders, scientists and oil and gas industry representatives appealed to Albany lawmakers to focus on the facts about natural gas exploration in the Marcellus Shale, specifically the safe process of hydraulic fracturing and the industry’s outstanding record of safety and environmental stewardship.

“While natural gas exploration has been conducted safely in New York for decades, the public has been misinformed repeatedly by extremists groups whose agenda is only to kill new investments in some of the state’s most economically deprived regions,” said Dan Fitzsimmons, president of the Joint Landowner Coalition representing landowner groups throughout central and southern New York. “We are here to set the record straight.”

Members of the New York State Legislature also addressed the 700 attendees.

“New York State has an excellent track record of protecting the environment while respecting the mineral rights of property owners,” said Assemblyman William L. Parment (D-North Harmony). “It is important that both of these concerns be addressed in a balanced manner.”

Also in attendance were Senator Thomas W. Libous, R-Binghamton and Assemblyman Clifford W. Crouch (R-Binghamton).

“Safe natural gas exploration is a tremendous opportunity for our communities,” said Senator Libous. “When the appropriate measures are put in place to regulate drilling in a responsible way, our entire state will feel the benefits, especially in the Southern Tier.”

“New York needs to move the approval process along swiftly,” said Assemblyman Crouch, adding economic opportunity and environmental stewardship have always successfully co-existed in New York. “The Marcellus Shale is the Wall Street for Upstate NY.”

The process of hydraulic fracturing – or “fracking” – releases gas locked in shale by injecting pressurized fluid into the formation to shatter the rock. It occurs deep underground and far from groundwater and surface water, and it has been performed safely in New York for decades. Expanded natural gas exploration will produce

efficient, abundant and environmentally clean fuel, increase New York's energy independence and bring thousands of jobs and billions of dollars to New York.

“Obstructionists have manufactured ‘facts’ in an effort to whip the public into a frenzy so they can raise funds for their organizations,” said John Holko, an oil and gas operator from Western New York. “They’ve made this a political issue, and not one based on fact. The truth is that hydraulic fracturing poses no threat to the environment.”

The Joint Landowner Coalition believes that through understanding New York's excellent track record thus far, the SEQRA laws and the DEC's stringent requirements, any impacts of natural gas exploration are adequately addressed.

“Yes, in some parts of the state, natural gas exploration will be a new experience. However, it's important to remember that natural gas exploration is not new to New York – there are more than 14,000 active wells in New York right now. Our coalition urges the state to move forward quickly and allow responsible drilling in the Marcellus to begin,” said Bryant Latourette with the Oxford landowner Group. “And since drilling has been determined safe, there is no reason that political issues should stand in the way of economic and energy progress.

Among the 17,500 households represented by the coalitions are fifth generation farmers who would not compromise their life's work and family's legacy if they thought a legitimate concern existed for their water, air or land. Leaders of these groups have spent the last two years researching the issues surrounding fracking and believe decisions should be made based on facts and evidence, not on hysteria and extremist agendas.

“The fact is that natural gas exploration can be performed safely and in an environmentally secure way in New York and should proceed,” said Fitzsimmons.

The economic impact of just 300 Marcellus Shale wells is estimated to exceed \$1.4 billion, with \$108 million going to landowners, \$19 million to municipal taxes, \$32 million to state coffers and thousands of new jobs.