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Arcuri Calls on Governor, DEC to Redo Draft natural Gas Drilling Regulations

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From Office of U.S. Rep. Michael A. Arcuri:

Today, U.S. Rep. Michael A. Arcuri (NY-24) called on Governor Paterson to withdraw the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (dSGEIS) because it does not go far enough to protect public health and the environment from potential harm as a result of natural gas drilling in Upstate New York.

Joined by local officials and environmental advocates at Taughannock Falls in Trumansburg, NY, Arcuri signed Toxics Targeting President Walter Hang's "Withdraw Draft SGEIS Coalition Letter," which was sent to the Governor. Arcuri is the only federal representative to sign the letter, which has received more than 10,000 signatures to date.

"I am proud to join the more than 10,000 signatories in calling on the Governor to withdraw the DEC's draft natural gas drilling regulations," said Arcuri. "With so many serious shortcomings in the scope of the SGEIS, it is apparent that the process must be restarted in order to ensure public health and the environment is protected from the potential harm associated with natural gas drilling. Although natural gas is a tremendous resource that presents a number of economic opportunities for Upstate families, we cannot let a rush to drill irreparably contaminate our most precious natural resource—our abundant supply of clean drinking water."

"I commend Congressman Arcuri for his courage and leadership in safeguarding New Yorkers from potential horizontal hydrofracturing hazards," said Walter Hang, President of Toxics Targeting, an environment database firm in Ithaca, NY. "Every constituent of the 24th Congressional District should support Congressman Arcuri decisive efforts to protect their public health and natural resources from irreparable harm."

The draft SGEIS for potential natural gas drilling activities in the Marcellus Shale formation was released by the DEC in September 2009 to supplement the existing GEIS written in 1992 to analyze the range of potential impacts of shale gas development using horizontal drilling and high-volume hydraulic fracturing. However, the draft fails to address many of the aggregate impacts on health and the environment that may be associated with gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing including, water supply, water quality, wastewater treatment operations, drill pad density, and infrastructure.

Arcuri added, “Hydraulic fracturing will likely involve the construction of hundreds, if not thousands of drilling pads. Since much of this area is either forest or farm land, it should be expected that constructing these drill pads will also require the construction of a significant amount of access roads as well. The dSGEIS contains no discussion on how many pads can be constructed per square mile, or what impact 5 or 50 pads would have. Additionally, who will pay to construct and maintain these roads or repair existing roads damaged by the increased heavy truck traffic? This is the sort of question taxpayer deserve to have answered before the DEC issues any drilling permits.”

Walter Hang is president of Toxics Targeting, an environmental database firm that helps to safeguard New York State’s drinking water. He and his colleagues have released extensive government information documenting natural gas hazards in New York State involving fires, explosions, polluted water supply wells, evacuated homes and massive uncontrolled wastewater releases.

Comments from other event attendees:

Martha Robertson, Chairwoman of the Tompkins County Legislature, said, “We are lucky to have Congressman Mike Arcuri fighting for our communities here in upstate New York; he knows how critical the quality of our water and air is to our tourism and agricultural sectors, and to our basic quality of life. Mike’s been speaking out for years and finding specific ways to hold the gas industry to the same standards of federal regulations as every other industry must meet. I’m delighted that he has turned his attention to the NYS DEC and is now calling on the agency to start over with its dSGEIS. We have all learned by watching the gas industry’s experiment that is going on in Pennsylvania, and the DEC must use those lessons to protect New York. I’m grateful to Mike for his dedication to this issue.”

Roxanne Marino, Town of Ulysses Supervisor, said, “Industrial-scale hydraulic fracturing as proposed in the shale formations of the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier is a land, water, and chemical-intensive activity that poses unacceptable risks to human health and safety and environmental degradation. The NYS DEC draft SGEIS and staffing are wholly inadequate to protect our communities and natural resources, as the DEC has recognized in excluding the New York City and Syracuse watersheds. All communities and land resources equally deserve the same protection. I applaud Congressman Arcuri for his commitment to the fight to restore the necessary State and Federal oversight regulations to protect all of New York State.”

A. Martin Petrovic, Mayor of Trumansburg, said, “There is no issue that could have as long lasting and devastating environmental consequences to the Finger Lakes and Southern tier region as ‘hydrofracking’ gas drilling. Something must be done to protect the natural resources, roads, our way of life and stunning natural beauty of our region. Actions are needed to protect us, most notably would be for Governor Paterson to withdraw the draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement written by NYDES in 2009. I commend the efforts of all to accomplish this task and for Representative Arcuri in supporting these efforts.”

Below is the text of the letter sent to Governor Paterson requesting the withdrawal of the draft SGEIS.

Honorable David A. Paterson
State Capital
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Paterson:

We, the undersigned, strongly support safeguarding the environment, public health and natural resources of the Catskills, Finger Lakes and Southern Tier regions that overlay the Marcellus Shale formation, potentially the largest natural gas reservoir in America. That is why we write to request you to withdraw the draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement released on 9/30/09 by your Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

High-volume "slickwater" hydrofracking has been proposed to recover Marcellus Shale gas on an unprecedented scale, but you required DEC to update its 1992 Oil, Gas and Solution Mining Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) prior to issuing new horizontal drilling permits. The goal of that Supplemental GEIS (SGEIS) reportedly was "to ensure that all environmental impacts from drilling are addressed."

The Draft SGEIS is based on one critical, bedrock assumption: DEC's 1992 GEIS adequately safeguards against: "impacts on water quality; impacts of drilling in sensitive areas, such as Agricultural Districts, areas of rugged topography, wetlands, drinking water watersheds, freshwater aquifers and other sensitive habitats; impacts caused by drilling and production wastes; impacts on land use; socioeconomic impacts; impacts on cultural resources and impacts on endangered species and species of concern."

A total of 270 oil and gas spills is posted at www.toxicstargeting.com. These uncontrolled releases caused fires, explosions, massive pollution releases, contaminated drinking water sources, home evacuations, tainted farmland and widespread threats to wetlands, streams, ponds, aquifers and other "sensitive receptors." Many of these DEC-reported problems have exceeded cleanup standards for decades.

DEC's own data document systematic, on-going failures to prevent oil and gas drilling pollution impacts or to clean them up. It is imperative that DEC resolve those regulatory shortcomings prior to issuing new drilling permits. Otherwise, the City of New York's reservoirs, other critical water supply sources and the environment of the Marcellus region as a whole could become irreparably contaminated.