

The Putnam Examiner

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Editorial

Hydro-Fracking Must Be Scrutinized by Public

For the people attending Chris Burger's Jan. 25 lecture at the Mahopac Library on the effects of hydraulic fracturing on the Marcellus Shale, Burger's scariest statement may have been that there were probably shale layers under the grounds of Putnam County.

"The Marcellus Shale is getting all the attention now, but after they kind of get the foothold you can be sure that they're going to go after all those formations at one point or another," Burger said.

Since the debate over hydro-fracking currently centers around the Marcellus Shale, which Putnam avoids by about 30 miles, the issue in the county is one of peripheral rather than direct interest. Though Burger's point was speculative, it underscored one of many reasons Putnam's residents should still be involved in the debate.

Until at least July, hydro-fracking has been put on hold in the Empire State, as former governor David Paterson signed a moratorium last December saying no horizontal drilling would take place until the state's Department of Environmental Conservation has a grasp on the issue. The DEC will complete its Generic Environmental Impact Statement some time after July 1.

There's a lot we don't know about hydraulic fracturing, though Burger painted an unappealing picture at Tuesday's lecture. What seems certain, though, is that the burden of protecting New York's air and water from potentially unsafe and detrimental practices will fall squarely on the shoulders of state officials, since the people's representatives on the national level have increasingly avoided doing so and local municipalities are in many cases powerless.

The Energy Policy Act of 2005, passed by Congress and signed by President Bush, exempted the oil and gas industries from having to comply with certain restrictions

in the Clean Water Act, Safe Water Drinking Act and Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act, among others. The industry is also exempt from local zoning and land-use regulations. It's hard to understand why the companies that can potentially do the most damage to our air and water are exempt from following the rules, but state officials must act accordingly.

One of New York's greatest assets is its drinking water, which the state has rightfully gone to great lengths to protect. Since federal laws seemingly won't suffice, the state government's role is even more important.

Once the GEIS is complete, there will be tremendous pressure from the oil industry as well as some business advocacy groups to move forward with hydro-fracking. It's essential that residents of Putnam and throughout New York stay up to speed and scrutinize whether ending the moratorium is truly in the best interest of the state's residents as a whole.

As Carmel Supervisor Ken Schmitt said of those with a vested interest in bringing hydraulic fracturing to New York, "They'll try to bring it in through the back door if they can."

It's up to the public to make sure they can't.

Sometimes Equality Isn't Equal

One of Paul Eldridge's first executive orders was to veto a resolution passed last year to enact term limits for county legislators. The veto was necessary because the law contained language that basically prevented the term limits from ever taking place. In his veto message, though, Eldridge went on to say he'd like to see the tenure allowed for the county executive and legislature to be equal. The legislation passed last year limited the county executive to eight years and legislators to 12 consecutive years.

Though this seems logical on its face, Eldridge is comparing apples and oranges in several ways. An individual legislator has just a fraction of the power of a county executive, representing just one-ninth of the legislative branch compared to the full power of the executive branch. The Charter Review Commission recommended the disparity because legislators are part-time officials, often with another job, and therefore need more time to get things done. A more significant difference, though, is the influence of each position and the kind of power a longstanding official in each position wields.

A county executive can gain a lot more power in eight years than an individual legislator can in 12. If the legislature does feel term limits are needed for both positions, they shouldn't feel obligated to make the numbers of years each can serve equal. After all, the president of the United States is limited to eight years, while senators and congressmen can serve until they're voted out.

Weekly Web Poll

Last week's poll question: Do you support the effort to repeal health care reform?

Results:

Yes - 58 percent

No - 42 percent

This week's poll question:
Should New York State allow hydraulic fracturing?

Visit www.theexaminernews.com today to vote.

Letters

SaniPro was Right Choice for Southeast Garbage

Your editorial of the January 25 edition of the Examiner omitted some salient points regarding the garbage contract for Southeast.

I supported the vote on selecting SaniPro as the carting company for the town because:

SaniPro had the required permit to operate in Putnam County, AAA had no such permit, SaniPro had very favorable references, AAA had uncomplimentary references, SaniPro had an excellent safety and maintenance program, AAA's programs in both areas were, according to our risk manager's report, weak and marginal at best. SaniPro had the necessary trucks to do the job; AAA did not have the

necessary vehicles. We have had consistent and reliable service over the last thirteen months. Yes, SaniPro is a few more dollars

Letters Policy

We invite readers to share their thoughts by sending letters to the editor. Please limit comments to 250 words. We will do our best to print all letters, but are limited by space constraints. Letters are subject to editing and may be withheld from publication on the discretion of the editor. Please refrain from personal attacks. Email letters to avitelli@theexaminernews.com. The Putnam Examiner requires that all letter writers provide their name, address and contact information.

a month, still by far the lowest carting rates of any town in Putnam County. As an elected official, I would have been derelict in my duty if I had not voted for SaniPro in September, 2009. Supervisor Rights and Councilman Yee initially wanted to keep AWS which had much higher rates than we presently enjoy. Councilman Johnson, Councilman Honeck and I made the correct decision, which was upheld by the state court, all four judges agreeing with our selection.

Roger S. Gross
Southeast

Roger Gross in a member of the Southeast Town Board