



## Fracking opponents put pressure on NY governor

- The Associated Press
- Posted August 1, 2012 at 2:14 p.m.

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) - Opponents of shale gas drilling that involves blasting chemical-laden water deep into the ground are asking Gov. Andrew Cuomo's top campaign contributors to pressure him to ban the practice in the state.

New York Residents Against Drilling and several other groups sent a letter to Cuomo's top 1,000 individual donors on Wednesday saying Cuomo's reported plan to permit hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, in a limited area would "treat Southern Tier residents as second class citizens and unfairly subject them to potentially irreparable hazards."

Environmentalists and other critics say fracking could poison water supplies, but the natural gas industry says it's been used safely for decades.

Cuomo hasn't denied a New York Times report in June that he plans to allow drilling to begin in the area near the Pennsylvania border where the Marcellus Shale is richest in gas and where communities have voiced support for the industry.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation hasn't allowed shale gas drilling since it began an environmental impact review and new regulations four years ago. It's updating regulations to address the potential impacts of new technology including horizontal drilling and high-volume fracking. The review is expected to be completed this year.

Signers of the letter, including Binghamton Mayor Matthew Ryan, ask donors to tell Cuomo to ban fracking until issues such as disposal of drilling wastewater and potential health impacts are fully addressed.

For Cuomo, a Democrat, the issue a bit sticky politically. Some of his base is steeped in the environmental movement. But Cuomo also has made job creation "Job One," and expanding an industry would help him during high unemployment.

Cuomo's biggest campaign donors come from business, which is pushing for fracking as a job creator and a way to reduce high taxes, another goal for Cuomo as he continues to brand himself as a fiscally conservative Democrat.

Walter Hang, who owns a consulting business that tracks toxic sites for property investors and other clients, said he believes Cuomo "listens a great deal to his biggest campaign contributors, many of whom are intensely involved in governmental affairs."

"If he hears from these contributors," Hang said, "it may be a more powerful message than when he hears from ordinary citizens."

Bill Mahoney, a campaign finance specialist with the New York Public Interest Research Group, said only about 1 percent of the business donations Cuomo has received has come from businesses focused on hydraulic fracturing. The largest donations in the past few years, he said, have come from New York City real estate interests.

"There are a lot of people on the donor list who may not have put a lot of thought into fracking and might be influenced by receiving a letter in the mail," Mahoney said. "It's fair to say these people they're contacting have more access to the governor than most New Yorkers do, so if they could convince them to become anti-frackers, it might help their cause."

A call for comment from Cuomo's office wasn't immediately returned Wednesday afternoon.

Also on Wednesday, residents of six Southern Tier towns where town boards have passed resolutions supportive of gas drilling spoke out against the resolutions, saying they don't represent the views of the majority of residents and were passed with little public input.

---

Associated Press writer Michael Gormley in Albany contributed to this report.