

Drilling supporters and opposition press their case as Cuomo visits

7:50 PM, May 30, 2013



RAW: Anti-fracking protesters rally in Binghamton

Written by Jon Harris



Isaac Silberman-Gorn, a member of Citizens Action, left, and **Walter Hang, of Toxics Targeting**, right, join anti-fracking protesters on the Binghamton University campus Thursday morning. / JEFF RICHARDS / CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

VESTAL — While Gov. Andrew Cuomo came to Binghamton University on Thursday to tout his Tax-Free NY initiative, about 50 protesters were focused on another topic: shale gas fracking.

The protesters camped outside the University Union East building, where Cuomo spoke, and held signs voicing their opposition to fracking in New York, often chanting anti-drilling slogans.

“This can not be done safely, and we don’t want it here in our community,” said Isaac Silberman-Gorn, environmental organizer at Citizen Action of New York.

While the opposition was pressing its case at Cuomo’s local appearance, landowner groups were trying to rally support in Albany. The state’s largest coalition of pro-drilling landowners hosted a forum Thursday, making the case for the soundness of hydraulic fracturing to an audience that featured lawmakers from both houses.

The panel discussion was billed as a response to Cuomo’s recent criticism of pro-fracking groups for not doing more to educate the public and allay concerns raised over the safety of shale-gas drilling.

Last week, Cuomo said he will make a decision on the fate of natural gas drilling in New York before the 2014 election. The governor is awaiting the completion of a review by State Health Commissioner Nirav Shah.

Though Cuomo’s presentation at BU was on his tax-free initiative, he addressed the fracking debate when pressed by reporters following his economic development talk. He repeated his common line on the topic, saying the decision is one that should be made based on science rather than emotion.

“The DEC commissioner and the health commissioner are analyzing the data and when they have a decision, that will be the decision and the path the state follows,” Cuomo said.

Walter Hang, president of Toxics Targeting, which is headquartered in Ithaca, said the health commissioner’s review is improper, as it is being completed without public input. “The governor is simply not listening.”

Dan Fitzsimmons, president of the Joint Landowners Coalition of New York, said drilling can be done safely and it can help clean up the environment by offering a more cost-effective energy source. And, he added, it will create jobs in the region and increase tax revenues.

“If (Cuomo) goes with the science, we’ll have gas drilling in New York state,” he said.

Jon Campbell of the Gannett Albany Bureau contributed to this report.