

REVOKING BAN ON NATURAL GAS DRILLING, OPENS JOB OPPORTUNITIES



Hundreds of job-seekers queued up on the floor of Broome Community College's Ice Center at the inaugural New York Natural Gas Career & Education Expo on Wednesday for New York's first job fair in the shale gas-drilling industry. Employers were anticipating that the state would lift a four-year old ban on hydraulic fracturing for natural gas. People had started coming well before the scheduled commencement time of 3 pm. The estimated 2,300 crowd included job seekers and exhibitors. Visitors ranged from business representatives and senior executives from the oil and gas industries to scientists. Steve Hertz, an event organizer said, "I'm optimistic in saying the industry will be working in New York state fairly soon under some very well-thought-out regulations and oversight." Broome County Executive Debra Preston recognized the debate, and even though some towns were enacting bans against it, she was optimistic the state Department of Environmental Conservation would complete its review and permit some shale drilling to begin this year. Buoyed up by the prospects of the re-opening the state's Department of Environmental Conservation, has received many applications. Amongst them, one of the leading operators in the natural gas business, Chesapeake Energy, the second largest natural gas producer in the country, who has applied for 47 permits. Prior to reopening natural gas drilling and revoking the ban, the New York's Department of Environmental Conservation is reviewing thousands of comments to proposed regulations and projected environmental impacts. "It's really going to help all the businesses in the region, from hotels and restaurants to places like Lowes, Home Depot, and clothing stores," she said at the job fair. The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research released a report last year that estimated New York could add up to 18,000 new jobs by 2015 if the state permits gas companies to drill in the Marcellus Shale. However, opponents have doubted the veracity of the report. Analysts say that the recalling the ban now could have come a little late as the industry is already seeing retrenchment as supplies near capacity and prices fall to a 10-year low. Still, companies and workers in the state's Southern Tier are profiting from the boom 20 miles south of Binghamton in Pennsylvania. Thousands of wells were drilled there since Marcellus Shale exploration began there about five years ago. Hydraulic fracturing was banned in 2008 owing to concerns about it leading to contamination of New York City's water supply. This form of drilling was not only economical but also allowed for high-volume drilling. The process releases the gas by fracturing the shale with an injection of water mixed with chemicals and sand. There were claims of groundwater pollution in Texas, Wyoming and Pennsylvania, attributed to the drilling practice. However, investigations by EPA, haven't found authoritative proof that natural gas drilling contaminated water supplies. However, the industry has both proponents and opponents. The proponents say that resumption of drilling will mean more jobs, increased local tax revenues, economic development and cheap homegrown energy. However, critics point to the health effects, a serene environment ravaged by machinery and other industry infrastructure and above all, an unsure economy. A study by Penn State Extension and Penn College reported that each Marcellus gas well would create 12 full-time jobs for at least 20 years. But there were negatives as well, in the form of the effect it would have on existing businesses, environmental damage and its resultant costs.

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