

## MARCELLUS SHALE WATCH

### **Hypocrisy, super-sized**

Though his proposed ban on super-sized sugary drinks in New York City grabs more headlines, Mayor Michael Bloomberg is also deeply committed to shaping U.S. energy policy.

He's put tons of his own money into the worthwhile cause of shutting down America's dirty old coal-burning power plants. Too bad that laudable effort is more than canceled out by his recent disgraceful stand in favor of high-volume fracking for natural gas.

Last year the mayor engineered a ban on fracking in New York City's watershed. Now he has to gall to stand on a soapbox and tell the country it needs fracking under "common-sense regulations" that render the environmentally dicey technique safe – for everyone else.

On Aug. 23, Bloomberg and George T. Mitchell, the so-called "Father of Fracking," signed the natural gas industry's dream op-ed article in The Washington Post.

Only magical thinkers still believe in "responsible" drilling (as it is widely practiced today with highvolume, slick-water, horizontal hydrofracking).

In reality, the fracking technique popularized in the last decade is far more dangerous to the environment than the method Mitchell pioneered — so much so that it required special exemptions from federal laws protecting our water and air. In 2005, then-Vice President Dick Cheney delivered those exemptions to his industry, allowing gas drillers like Halliburton to privatize gain and socialize environmental loss.

Those loopholes are worth big money. Who's going to step up and try to take them away with reregulation?

Certainly not Bloomberg. He doesn't even need to try because he's already cut his backroom deal.

The city's own environmental regulators studied the science long enough to see that modern fracking was nothing to toy with. So Bloomberg and company explained to the state Department of Environmental Conservation that they would not be participating in high-volume fracking exploits of any kind -- "responsible" or not.

Caving to power, the DEC carved the New York City watershed out of the whole dirty business. In doing so, the agency put politics ahead of its mandate to provide all New Yorkers equal protection from environmental exploitation. It's fine to expose tens of thousands of private water wells upstate to the risks of modern fracking, but it's not OK to expose the city's elite to identical risks.

The Bloomberg/ Mitchell article doesn't promote, or even mention, equal protection. In fact, by injecting himself into the national fracking debate after he's negotiated special protection for his city, Bloomberg is suggesting that America should follow New York State's example of delineating zones of environmental privilege and sacrifice, based on political clout.

Bloomberg must truly believe that drilling can be done sensibly and responsibly because he promises

to donate \$7 million to the Environmental Defense Fund to develop “common-sense regulations that will protect the environment.”

That amounts to 0.0318 percent of his fortune, which Forbes pegs at \$22 billion.

Will that be enough to empower the EDF to defeat the industry in a lobbying confrontation over the “Halliburton loophole” status quo? Give a bunny better odds against a hungry coyote.

In New York state, the fracking industry has so much influence that its lobbyists draft bills that the DEC greases through the Legislature. That’s why the state has some of the skimpiest drilling setback requirements and the most extreme prodriller eminent domain rules in the land.

Ever tried to take a privilege away from a spoiled child? Or worse, require that child to act responsibly?

State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli pushed a bill this year that would have established an accident fund, underwritten by the natural gas industry, to cover fracking’s inevitable mishaps.

But gas drillers refuse to pay for the proposed fund. So while DiNapoli’s bill passed the state Assembly, frackers convinced their friends in the state Senate to kill it.

That’s the problem with the Bloomberg/Mitchell blue sky principles of fracking regulation: disclose fracking chemicals, tighten well construction rules, protect groundwater, improve pollution controls, reduce impact on roads. They are all so easy to tout, so hard to enact.

They say natural gas produces far less greenhouse gas effects than coal “IF properly extracted and distributed.” But that’s a huge ‘IF.’ Again it presumes a change in the status quo that a deep pocket industry will fight.

That’s why so many independent scientists, doctors, engineers and former energy industry executives call on Cuomo to extend the state’s moratorium on modern fracking.

They simply reject the idea that political magical thinking will adequately answer their sciencebased objections.

*Peter Mantius is a freelance journalist from Schuyler County who closely follows shale gas drilling issues. He is a former longtime reporter for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and editor of two business weeklies in the Northeast.*



**PETER MANTIUS**

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