March 5, 2012

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express serious concerns about your remarks on natural gas drilling in the State of the Union address. We represent 109 organizations in 16 states that together have more than 3 million members and supporters. Many of our communities have been harmed by reckless natural gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing or are facing the prospect of drilling and “fracking” without adequate safeguards.

Although we were encouraged by your stated commitment to safe development of natural gas reserves and by your insistence on disclosure of chemicals used in drilling on federal lands, we were troubled by your claim that government investment in shale gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing has been a clear-cut success story.

In response to the public’s justifiable concerns, the Environmental Protection Agency is currently conducting two studies to determine whether hydraulic fracturing can contaminate groundwater. Until now, there has been very little research on this question. In its draft report on one study, the EPA has already concluded that hydraulic fracturing was a likely cause of groundwater contamination in Pavillion, Wyo. This finding is similar to EPA’s conclusion in a 1987 report to Congress that hydraulic fracturing could – and did – contaminate underground water supplies. The other ongoing EPA study is national in scope, and the agency is scheduled to release initial findings later this year, with additional findings planned through 2014.

Separately, the EPA recently found in an ongoing investigation that four water wells in Dimock, Penn. contained hazardous substances two years after the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania found that these wells and others nearby had been contaminated by shale gas drilling activity. Pennsylvania officials estimate that extending public water lines to the 19 families in Dimock whose water was polluted by improper drilling would cost $12 million. In neighboring New York state, officials estimate that if shale gas drilling were to contaminate New York City’s upstate water supply, the city would have to build a water filtration plant at a minimum cost of $8 billion, with operating expenses of $200 million a year – if the water could be cleaned up at all. There and in a number of other states, lenders and public officials are increasingly worried that natural gas and oil leases may violate the terms of the mortgages or title insurance on a potentially large number of homes and make it difficult for owners to sell or refinance.

Amid mounting evidence of the harm and significant costs associated with drilling and fracking, it is simply premature to declare that government investment in shale gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing has been a success.

In addition, your statement that “we have a supply of natural gas that can last America nearly one hundred years” was troublesome. As the Department of Energy makes clear, the nation may have a 100-year supply – if drilling companies can economically extract the “technically recoverable” gas that scientists believe is in the ground and if the rate of consumption remains constant. Those are very big
assumptions, as the Department of Energy recently demonstrated when it significantly reduced its estimate of recoverable shale gas. Exports may also reduce the domestic supply. Hundreds of internal drilling industry emails and documents uncovered by the New York Times last year cast doubt on how much shale gas can be recovered. We cannot rely on an energy policy based on the industry’s false assumptions, nor can we justify lax regulation in the fond hope that shale gas drilling will be a magic bullet to meet the nation’s energy needs.

We are also skeptical of your claim that natural gas drilling “will support more than 600,000 jobs by the end of the decade.” The drilling industry’s job creation claims can be illusory. New wells and pipelines are often installed by skilled itinerant workers already employed in the industry. New York state officials predict that if shale gas drilling is allowed there, 77 percent of the workers in the first year will come from out of state, a clear indication that they are already working in the drilling industry.

Thomas Power, former chairman of the University of Montana economics department and an authority on energy industry employment, commented to the New York Times that more drilling is “not going to make a dent in the unemployment rate, because the vast majority of people who have those skills are very busy right now pursuing oil and gas.”

You are no doubt also aware that natural gas drilling is an inherently risky activity, as the industry itself concedes in its filings to the Securities and Exchange Commission. These records, designed to protect investors, cite a daunting litany of explosions, leaks, spills, environmental damage, lack of insurance, bodily injury and even death. Drilling companies themselves call these risks among the “most significant” they face.

Despite such risks, natural gas and oil companies enjoy exemptions from seven key federal environmental laws, including the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. State laws, meanwhile, typically allow companies to operate dangerously close to people’s homes and drinking water sources. And states do not require disclosure of drilling risks when companies lease drilling rights from landowners – a process that one major gas producer, Oklahoma City-based Chesapeake Energy Corp., proudly called a “land grab.” Citizens in several states have criticized drilling companies for deceptive leasing tactics. You rightfully cited the recent financial crisis as an example of a dangerous lack of regulation. Allowing drilling companies to operate with only minimal oversight sets the stage for another preventable disaster.

Your administration deserves credit for moving ahead with the essential scientific research and basic disclosure that can help hold the industry accountable. But endorsing shale gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing before we know whether these innovations can be deployed safely will make it more difficult to develop safeguards that will provide us with energy while protecting our drinking water, homes and health.

Sincerely,

Kenneth A. Cook, President
Environmental Working Group
Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director
*Citizens Campaign for the Environment*

Rachel Lincoln Sarnoff, Executive Director/CEO
*Healthy Child Healthy World*

Jim Dean, Chair
*Democracy for America*

Patrick J. Carolan, Executive Director
*Franciscan Action Network*

Sean Moulton, Director of Information Policy
*OMB Watch*

Donny Nelson, Chair
*Western Organization of Resource Councils Oil and Gas Campaign Team*

Lois Gibbs, Executive Director
*Center for Health, Environment & Justice*

Terry Nordbrock, Executive Director
*National Disease Clusters Alliance (NDCA)*

Melinda Hughes-Wert, President
*Nature Abounds*

Marianne Comfort, Education Coordinator
*Institute Justice Team, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas*

**California**

Michael Green, Executive Director
*Center for Environmental Health*

Paul Ferrazzi, Director
*Citizens Coalition for a Safe Community*

Severine von Tscharner Fleming
*The Greenhorns*

**Colorado**

Dr. Theo Colborn, President
*The Endocrine Disruption Exchange (TEDX)*

Gretchen Nicholoff, President
*Western Colorado Congress*

**Connecticut**

Terri Eickel, Director
*Interreligious Eco-Justice Network*

**Maryland**

David Curson, PhD,
Director of Bird Conservation
*Audubon Maryland-DC*

Leslie Morrison, MD Community Organizer
*Chesapeake Climate Action Network*

Christine Sweeney, President
*Talbot River Protection Association*

Karen Lukacs, Executive Director
*Wicomico Environmental Trust*

Judith Stribling, President
*Friends of the Nanticoke River*

**Michigan**

Julie Lyons Bricker, Executive Director
*Michigan Interfaith Power & Light*

Joanne Cromley & Mary Reilly, Co-Chairs
*Don’t Frack Michigan*

**Montana**

Walter Archer, Chair
*Northern Plains Resource Council*

**New Jersey**

Rev. Fletcher Harper, Executive Director
*GreenFaith*

Julia Somers, Executive Director
*New Jersey Highlands Coalition*
Deidre Imus, Founder & President  
*The Deidre Imus Environmental Health Center*

**New Mexico**

Douglas Meiklejohn, Executive Director  
*New Mexico Environmental Law Center*

**New York**

James R. Dean, Trustee  
*The Village of Cooperstown, NY*

Kate Hudson, Watershed Program Director  
*Riverkeeper*

Jill Wiener, Representative  
*Catskill Citizens for Safe Energy*

Janna Stieg Watkins, Director  
*New York Interfaith Power & Light*

Lea Kone, Assistant Director  
*Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY)*

Wes Gillingham, Program Director  
*Catskill Mountainkeeper*

Mary Smith, Communications Coordinator  
*Church Women United in New York State*

Ellen Pope, Director  
*Otsego 2000*

Claire Sanberg, Executive Director  
*Water Defense*

Nada Khader, Executive Director  
*WESPAC Foundation*

Sandra Kissam, President  
*Stewart Park and Reserve Coalition (SPARC)*

Gay Nicholson, President  
*Sustainable Tompkins*

Susan Van Dolsen  
*Westchester for Change*

Peter Hudiburg, Founder  
*Plymouth Friends of Clean Water*

Patricia J. Wood, Executive Director  
*Grassroots Environmental Education*

Allegra Schecter, Representative  
*ROAR Against Fracking*

Harry Levine, President  
*Advocates for Springfield*

Marie Terlizzi, Co-Founder  
*People Advocating for the Use of Sustainable Energy*

Sarah White, Representative  
*Middlefield Neighbors*

Lynn Marsh, President  
*Advocates for Cherry Valley, Inc.*

Siobhan Burke, Co-Founder  
*Capital District Against Fracking*

Robert Nied, Co-Director  
*Schoharie Valley Watch*

Julie Huntsman, Spokesperson  
*Otsego Neighbors*

Rita Yelda, Organizer  
*Western New York Drilling Alliance*

Erin Heaton, Representative  
*Chenango Community Action for Renewable Energy*

Lisa Zaccaglini, Founder  
*Sharon Springs Against Hydrofracking*

Steven Zerby, Representative  
*Westford Neighbors*

Mary Beilby, Representative  
*Gas Drilling Awareness for Courtland County*
Maureen Dill, Representative
Advocates for Morris

Jeff Dembowski, Co-Founder
Gas Free Seneca

Anna Sears & Nedra Harvey, Co-Founders
Rochesterians Concerned About Unsafe Shale-Gas Extraction (R-CAUSE)

Len Bjorkman, Representative
Tioga Peace and Justice

**North Carolina**

Kathy Shea, M.D. & Susannah Tuttle, Co-Directors
North Carolina Interfaith Power and Light,
North Carolina Council of Churches

Danna Smith, Executive Director
Dogwood Alliance

Hope Taylor, Executive Director
Clean Water for North Carolina

Fawn Pattison, Executive Director
Toxic Free North Carolina

George Santucci, Executive Director
National Committee for the New River

**North Dakota**

Verle Reinicke, Chair
Dakota Resource Council

**Ohio**

Rev. Jim Deming, Minister for Environmental Justice
Justice and Witness Ministries,
United Church of Christ

Vanessa Pesec, President
NEOGAP

Stefanie Penn Spear, Founder & Executive Director
EcoWatch

Jack Shaner, Deputy Director
Ohio Environmental Council

Nathan G. Johnson, Attorney
Buckeye Forest Council

Ron Prosek, Convener
Faith Communities Together for Frac Awareness (FaCT)

Chris Borello, President
Concerned Citizens of Lake Township

Chris Borello, President
Concerned Citizens of Stark County

Vickie Hennessey, President
Green Environmental Coalition

Lori Babbey, Representative
Concerned Citizens of Portage County

Leslie Harper, Representative
Northwest Ohio Alliance to Stop Fracking

Sandra Bilek, Representative
Concerned Citizens of Medina County

Ron Prosek, Chairman
Mentor Lagoons Preservation Committee

Susie Beiersdorfer, Representative
Frackfree Mahoning Valley

Lynn Anderson, Representative
The Guardians of Mill Creek Park

**Pennsylvania**

Tracy Carluccio, Deputy Director
Delaware Riverkeeper Network

Barbara Arrindell, Director
Damascus Citizens for Sustainability
Ruth McDermott-Levy & Nina Kaktins, Environmental Health Committee Co-Chairs
*PA State Nurses Association*

Grady Avant, Board Member
*FrackAlert*

Ryan Talbott, Executive Director
*Allegheny Defense Project*

Sr. Suzanne Maschek, Sector North America Coordinator
*Medical Mission Sisters*

Nora Nash, Director, Corporate Social Responsibility
*Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia*

Sr. Frances Murray, O.S.F., Chair
*Advocacy Committee for Justice and Peace Of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia*

Sr. Susan Schorsten, Pastoral Leader
*Sisters of the Humility of Mary*

Claudia Detwiler, Representative
*Marcellus Shale Protest*

Paula Chaiken, Outreach Coordinator
*Gas Drilling Awareness Coalition*

Christine Griffin, Representative
*No Frackin’ PA*

Wanda Guthrie, Co-Convener
*Local Authority Western PA (LAWPA)*

Wanda Guthrie, Convener
*Murrysville Marcellus Community Group*

Michael Bagdes-Canning, Organizer
*Marcellus Outreach Butler*

Elisa Beck, Representative
*Sustainable Monroeville*

Richard Yanock, President
*Izaak Walton League of America, Washington County Chapter*

Debbie Borowiec, Representative
*Concerned Citizens Against Marcellus Pollution*

Stan Shapiro, Vice Chair
*Philadelphia Neighborhood Networks*

Jason Bell, Organizer
*Tour de Frack*

**Virginia**

Kate Wofford, Executive Director
*Shenandoah Valley Network*

**Washington, D.C.**

Sr. Janet Gottschalk, Director
*Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice*

**West Virginia**

Jim Sconyers, Chapter Chair
*Sierra Club, West Virginia Chapter*

Betty L. Wiley, President
*Dunkard Creek Watershed Association*

Carol Warren, Project Coordinators
*Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition*

**Wyoming**

Steve Jones, Watershed Protection Program Attorney
*Wyoming Outdoor Council*

Kevin F. Lind, Director
*Powder River Basin Resource Council*
Cc: The Honorable Christopher Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oil & Natural Gas, U.S. Department of Energy