

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.

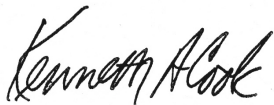
Thomas Power, former chairman of the University of Montana economics department and an authority on energy industry employment, commented to the New York Times that more drilling is "not going to make a dent in the unemployment rate, because the vast majority of people who have those skills are very 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 Tscharnern 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 Schechter, 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