

*January 22, 2013*

***TO: THE PEOPLE OF LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT 8***

**GET FACTS BEFORE FRACKING**

Hydraulic Fracturing or “fracking,” a drilling process used to extract natural gas from mile-deep shale, uses millions of gallons of pressurized water and over 500 chemicals, many of which are carcinogens. Several states, including Pennsylvania and Ohio, have seen dire consequences linked to fracking, including sickened people and farm animals, flammable tap water, well explosions, polluted streams and escaping gases. In addition, companies have no safe way to recycle most of the toxic water used in fracking. According to the Susquehanna River Basin Compact, only 14% of the water used to frack a well in central Pennsylvania is recycled. That’s up from less than 1% two years ago.

In 2011, Governor O’Malley appointed a 15-member commission to study environmental and public Safety risks associated with fracking. A majority of Maryland voters – 71% - also want the conclusions of such studies before fracking can begin in the state. The rub is that the \$2 million needed to pay for a thorough study has not been found. During the 2012 session, approval of legislation to impose a study-funding per acre fee on the natural gas companies that have leased farmland in Western Maryland was blocked by the American Petroleum Industry (API), a wealthy trade association, representing Exxon Mobil, Chevron and Shell. It should be noted that seven Atlantic states, including Maryland, have threatened to sue the EPA in an attempt to get harsher air quality rules on fracking. New York’s Attorney General said, “Regulators have failed to require the industry to use available and cost-effective measures to control” emissions from drilling sites.

Although the commission’s final report is due August 2014, without the study funding, the group has made little progress. Legislation will be introduced to prevent fracking until the study is completed. The proposal authorizes, but does not require, the Department of Natural Resources to set and collect a fee for the study. The panel has recommended several bills to address fracking concerns, including a state severance tax on any gas extracted to help pay for negative effects on nearby communities. Other bills would give landowners the right to compensation if drilling harms their property, require those who negotiate drilling leases to register with the state and require drilling companies to provide binding assurance that they will pay to clean up any leaks or pollution from their wells.

Certainly, I am aware of the jobs and tax revenue that would come with allowing fracking in Maryland. However, I am also aware of fracking’s potential to contaminate groundwater and sicken people in the vicinity. Once poisoned, there is no redeeming groundwater and often there is no restoring the health of someone made ill from the effects of fracking. That is a sobering thought. In short, we should have all the facts about fracking before we allow it to occur.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on this or any other issue of concern to you. As always, I encourage and welcome your input.