

# Cuomo knocks fracking groups

Governor says they should allay fears of the public

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ALBANY — Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Monday criticized the strategy employed by groups who favor hydraulic fracturing, saying their lobbyists should spend more time educating the public and less time focused on “hallway chatter.”

In an interview with Gannett’s Albany Bureau, Cuomo reiterated his position that an ultimate decision on whether to allow large-scale fracking in New York would be based on “facts and science.” But he suggested that pro-fracking groups aren’t using their time wisely as the state’s de facto moratorium on shale-gas drilling stretches beyond 4½ years.

“I think the landowners’ consultants and the lobbyists for the pro-fracking groups would be better advised to spend their time actually getting out information to allay the fears of the people of this state than worrying about hallway chatter,” Cuomo said. “Their

job is to communicate to the people of the state, to say that this is a safe process, to be open and available.

“And that’s what they should be doing.”

Cuomo’s decision-making process on hydrofracking has come under increasing scrutiny in recent weeks after his administration missed a Feb. 27 deadline to finalize a set of proposed drilling regulations. Recent reports have suggested his former brother-in-law Robert F. Kennedy, a well-known environmentalist, influenced him to hold off on allowing the natural-gas extraction process to proceed, a charge Cuomo has denied.

The governor’s comments came following a meeting of his cabinet Monday, where state Health Commissioner Nirav Shah said the department’s review of fracking’s potential impacts should be completed in “the next few weeks.” Shah said he would not be waiting for the completion of outside studies — including one by Pennsylvania-based Geisinger Health System — before issuing his findings.

“We’ve been working with our experts very closely, going back and forth,” Shah said. “I antic-

ipate we’ll be done in the next few weeks.

There’s no real timetable. We are learning more information as we go and we want to make sure we cover all the ground and not rush through this.”

High-volume fracking in gas-rich formations like the Marcellus Shale in the Southern Tier remains on hold until Shah’s review is complete and incorporated into permitting guidelines from the Department of Environmental Conservation.

Supporters of fracking — the much-debated technique in which water, sand and chemicals are injected into underground rock formations to release tightly packed natural gas — were miffed by Cuomo’s remarks Monday.

Scott Kurkoski, the Broome County-based attorney for the Joint Landowners Coalition of New York, said the pro-fracking group has focused on making its case to the public, but its members have grown frustrated with the state’s lengthy decision-making process.

“There’s no one in this state that has educated



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landowners better than the Joint Landowners Coalition of New York,” Kurkoski said. “The fact of the matter is a lot of landowners have just given up on it. They don’t come to educational meetings anymore because they’re so discouraged at what our state is doing.”

The criticism and subsequent pushback came the same day as a new Siena College poll showed a continued split among New Yorkers on the merits of hydrofracking, which proponents say could be an economic engine for the struggling Southern Tier and opponents say could cause irreparable harm to the environmental and public health.

About 43 percent were opposed to fracking and 39 percent in favor, according to Siena.

Critics of fracking weren’t pleased with Cuomo’s remarks, either. Katherine Nadeau, water and natural resources program director for Environmental Advocates of New York, said Cuomo’s job is “to protect New Yorkers health, not provide public relations advice to a multibillion-dollar industry.”

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