MORE GAS THAN TEETH: PROBLEMS WITH THE DRAFT NYS ENERGY PLAN

On January 7, Governor Cuomo's Energy Planning Board released a draft of its long-awaited **New York State Energy Plan.** Despite bold words about clean energy and efficiency, pictures of solar farms, and quotes by historic figures like Edison and Einstein, the document lacks specific commitments necessary to lead New York to a sustainable future. Worse still, forecasts and policies in the plan actually promote the widespread expansion of natural gas produced from fracking and fail to set meaningful targets for the reduction of climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions.
Comments can be submitted **online** or by **mail**, however all must be received by **April 30, 2014**.
Six public hearings have also been scheduled. (See www.energyplan.ny.gov for more information.)

- **The document is not a plan.** Instead it relies heavily on forecasts made in the absence of planning. According to the document's own data, power generation from wind and solar more than doubled in New York State between 1990 and 2012, far outpacing every other energy source—including natural gas. Ignoring these outstanding indicators, however, the document accepts a dismal baseline forecast of anemic growth in renewables energy while predicting major growth in natural gas. By using dubious forecasts to guide future policy, the plan becomes little more than a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. Instead of relying on passive forecasts, Governor Cuomo's energy plan should proactively chart a course for the future, bucking trends as necessary with aggressive targets for renewable energy that will free New York of its addiction to fossil fuels.

- **Key documents have been withheld from the public.** These include a greenhouse gas inventory document and a report titled "Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Potential in New York State" prepared by Optimal Energy, Inc. According to the draft plan, the data in both reports are preliminary, which suggests that consideration of the plan itself is premature. Nevertheless, both documents should be immediately released to the public since they are critical to the plan and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

- **The plan describes natural gas as a "clean" energy source. It is not.** Fracking—the primary method of gas extraction today—poisons land, air, and water, makes people sick, and contributes to climate change. Because much of the draft plan is ambiguously written in support of "clean energy", many of its initiatives and programs—including the Governor's much-acclaimed "Green Bank"—could actually be directed toward expanding the use of fracked gas and its infrastructure. In addition, initiatives #6, #8, and #9 in the plan explicitly promote the acceleration and expansion of natural gas, including oil-to-gas conversion and infrastructure for gas transmission and distribution.

- **The plan predicts FRACKING in New York.** Cloaked in confusing and contradictory language, the document forecasts that natural gas produced in New York will triple by 2030 with the lifting of the state's current moratorium on high-volume horizontal fracking. The document goes on to say that this is a "conservative" estimate and that volumes could be even higher if "production and permitting difficulties" are reduced.

- **The document provides no path for achieving greenhouse gas reduction goals**. Executive Order #24 by former Governor Patterson requires that by 2050, New York State reduce total emissions 80% from 1990 levels. While acknowledging this, the draft plan only commits to measuring the reduction of one greenhouse gas—carbon dioxide—before 2030. This ignores the significant impact of methane, the primary component of fracked gas. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, methane is 34 times more potent of a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide over one hundred years, and 86 times more potent over twenty. Rather than cherry-picking targets that favor the natural gas industry, the final energy plan should specify a schedule for the reduction of ***total*** greenhouse gas emissions with benchmarks at regular intervals. Furthermore, the next twenty years will be pivotal to the future of the planet, so models should be revised to take into account the full impacts of methane during this time. To fairly weigh the relative impact of renewables to fossil fuels, models should also be revised to address the total emission footprint of energy use (including emissions occurring during extraction, processing, and transport, whether inside New York or out of state).

- **The document fails to define what New York's power generation portfolio will look like.** The plan contains no analysis to determine a mix of energy sources that will meet carbon reduction goals, and makes no commitment about what percentage of New York's energy will come from renewables. At a minimum, the final plan should set a

target through the Public Services Commission of meeting half the state's electricity demand with renewable energy in the next ten years (50% by 2025), and identify what facilities and grid improvements are needed to achieve this. The plan should lay out a path for transitioning completely to renewables by mid-century.

- **The document dismisses the full potential of renewable energy.** Unlike other energy sources, including natural gas, the draft plan downplays the potential for renewables using a term described as "bounded technical potential" (BTP). Failing to commit to a particular target and without explaining how BTP is calculated, the plan concludes that no more than 18% of the state's energy needs could be met with renewables by 2020 and no more than 37% by 2030. In 2013, a team of scientists and economists issued a report titled *"Examining the feasibility of converting New York State's all-purpose energy infrastructure to one using wind, water, and sunlight"* (Jacobson, et al) which determined how New York could actually transition entirely to renewable energy by 2030. The draft plan contains no mention of this report. Rather than placing a pessimistic cap on the promise for renewable energy, the NYS energy plan should set an example for the nation by advancing an aggressive strategy for weaning New York entirely from its dependency on fossil fuels.

- **The plan forecasts growth in nuclear power**, despite numerous barriers to the continued use or development of nuclear energy. No new nuclear plants are proposed within the state and the Cuomo administration has actually opposed the relicensing of the reactors at Indian Point. A danger of promoting imaginary optimism in nuclear power is that when existing facilities are decommissioned, agencies and industry may advocate for the construction of even more power plants to run on fracked gas. The document needs to perform an honest assessment of nuclear power and plan for the replacement of all extracted fuels with renewable energy.

- **The draft plan lacks targets for energy efficiency.** The draft plan commits to efficiency programs only through 2020. Programs should be ongoing, and specific targets set with funds identified to achieve at least 20% of forecasted energy demand through efficiency improvements by 2025. Although the plan vaguely discusses building codes and appliance standards, it contains no specific actions or measures about how they will be improved and more aggressively enforced.

- **Transportation goals are vague, misleading, and not supported by science.** The draft plan promotes "vehicle diversity" and praises the NY Clean Fleets Initiative. Not limited to electric vehicles, however, this program provides public money to help purchase vehicles that run on compressed or liquefied natural gas. New science has shown that natural gas is actually worse for the climate than traditional fuels like diesel due to methane leaks in the supply chain. Further, the draft plan offers no details about how New York will implement a memorandum of understanding it signed with seven other states to put 3.3 million zero-emission vehicles on the road by 2025. Rather than encouraging vehicles that run on climate-killing fossil fuels, New York should establish specific targets to advance electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel-cell technology.

- **The negative health and economic impacts of relying on fossil fuels are largely ignored.** Even if fracking is never permitted in New York, the consequence of using more fracked gas will mean greater exposure of people—both in New York and elsewhere—to polluted air and water, fracking waste on roads and in landfills, higher levels of radon gas, and the industrialization of rural areas. The plan fails to comprehensively address the many issues relating to emissions, safety, and environmental degradation from gas infrastructure, such as industrial plants to process, store, and distribute liquefied natural gas and petroleum gas (LNG and LPG), fueling stations, compressor stations, and pipelines. Although the draft plan mentions the potential for price volatility from exporting fracked gas, it fails to call for any corrective action. The long-term vulnerability of creating dependency on another fossil fuel that will be depleted in a few decades is not even considered.

- **The plan ignores security and terrorism concerns.** Although the draft plan briefly discusses security for nuclear power, it essentially ignores the vulnerability of natural gas infrastructure such as processing and storage facilities, pipelines, compressor stations, and distribution systems to attack. A 2008 Congressional report titled *"Liquefied Natural Gas Infrastructure Security"* found that "LNG infrastructure is inherently hazardous and potentially attractive to terrorists," and in 2013 a LNG plant in Yemen was actually the targeted by Al Qaida. If gas infrastructure grows in New York as promoted by the draft plan, these dangers will grow as well.