

'No Fracking Way' serves as theme for anti-drilling faction

Julia Hunter, Gannett News Service, 9-13-10

BINGHAMTON -- They beat on bongos and shook tambourines as they danced to their own song. Decorations could be seen from down the block.

It wasn't a party, but an anti-drilling rally outside The Forum before and during parts of Monday's EPA meeting.

Their song? "No Fracking Way," which began as a chant but, as the day continued, morphed into a rhythmic melody echoing down Washington Street.

Their props? A mock drilling rig adorned with a roulette wheel offering the two chances of gas or water, a skull and hazard signs. There were costumes, too, like the man clad in a HAZMAT suit and gas mask. Oh, and there was Frackin'stein.

Though Craig Sautner wore jeans and a T-shirt, he brought a prop -- a half-full gallon jug of murky water to the event. It was labeled Dimock, Pa., and came from his well -- the well he and his family drank from for a year, and though it was filtered at the time, he said it was unsafe.

"My kids were getting sick," Sautner said of the contaminated water resulting from extensive drilling nearby. "They were getting eczema over their elbows, down their legs and everything from the well water. My daughter would get in the shower in the morning and she would have to get out and lay on the floor because she thought she was going to pass out cause of all the methane sucking the oxygen out of the air."

Sautner said his family isn't anti-drilling or pro-drilling, but just wants to educate people on the possible repercussions of hydraulic fracturing -- something he hoped to do at Monday's event.

Politicians who spoke during their allotted two minutes inside The Forum also took the opportunity beforehand to get anti-drillers revved up.

Binghamton Mayor Matthew Ryan said more money should have spent on a green alternative to fracking.

"This is about environmental justice, this is about environmental racism," Ryan said. "It's about protecting our ecology, it's about making sure our infrastructure's protected if drilling ever does come to this area. It's about making sure the EPA (does) the types of things they're supposed to do. The Environmental Protection Agency: that's what they're called."

Martha Robertson, chair of the Tompkins County Legislature, argued the economic benefit has been overplayed.

"They say it'll bring prosperity to upstate New York," Robertson said. "But you know what? In Pennsylvania, 90 percent of the jobs are going to out-of-state workers."

Susan Multer, a social worker from Horseheads, came to voice her opinion, and said she was glad to see the turnout from many in areas where drilling has gone wrong, such as Dimock.

"I think the public is waking up, and maybe some public officials," Multer said. "Sad to say, but the more accidents that happen ... when you read about these real events, you can't ignore it anymore."