

New York official says state could revisit fracking ban

Scott Waldman, Capital New York Magazine, 1-28-15

ALBANY—State Department of Environmental Conservation commissioner Joe Martens said on Wednesday that the state could reevaluate its fracking ban at some point in the future.

During a budget hearing, Martens said he does not think New York officials will revisit the fracking ban imposed earlier this year any time soon, but said many of the studies on which his staff and health department officials relied are ongoing. He said if they find fracking can be done safely, state officials will likely review the ban.

“It can be revisited when new or significant information comes to light. It's an evolving field,” he said. “The industry has made lots of improvements.”

The Cuomo administration effectively banned fracking last month, after years of delaying a decision. New York is the only state with major natural gas deposits to ban fracking.

Martens said state officials are meeting weekly on fracking, and will soon release the final supplemental generic environmental impact study that is the final legal step for the ban.

New Senate environmental conservation committee chair Tom O'Mara, a Republican from the Finger Lakes region, predicted a day will come when New York revisits the fracking ban. He criticized the ban as a “political football” that was not based on science.

“We go through eight years and come down to a scientific conclusion to whether or not I want my children to live near it, doesn't seem to come down to too much science,” O'Mara said. (The acting state health commissioner, Howard Zucker, said in announcing the ban that he would not feel safe with his own children living in areas that permit fracking.)

Martens pushed back, saying the state is not ready for fracking now.

“Lots of things could change, where we are today. We don't feel we're ready for it in New York,” he said.