New York Times Editorial, March 29, 2010
FINDING NATURAL GAS, SAFELY,
EPA will soon begin a much-needed study on water quality and public health of a method of extracting natural gas called hydraulic fracturing. An EPA investigation in 2004 was rightly seen as superficial and skewed toward industry, which provided much of the underlying data. This one must be comprehensive and transparent.

It must be swift. The search for natural gas has exploded beyond the usual venues like Texas and the Rocky Mountain West to Pennsylvania and New York State, site of a vast deposit called the Marcellus Shale.

Hydraulic fracturing involves blasting water, sand and chemicals into underground formations to unlock the gas. The technique has been implicated in a growing number of water pollution cases. New York State has been forces to review plans to allow exploratory drilling upstate, including New York City's watershed, because of fears that an accidental release of toxic chemicals could poison the water supply for millions of people.

Representative Maurice Hinchey, a Democrat from New York, had inserted a provision in a spending bill urging the EPA to undertake the study. Mr. Hinchey is also the co-author, with Diana DeGette, a Colorado Democrat, of a bill that would force industry to disclose the chemicals it uses and require regulation of the process under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Industry has publicly endorsed the E.P.A. review and expressed confidence that it will show that hydraulic fracturing is, in the words of the American Petroleum Institute, a "safe and well-understood technology" that has allowed access to huge new supplies of natural gas.

At the same time, industry opposes the second bill, claiming that the chemicals it uses are proprietary secrets and that the new regulations would deter production. Mr. Hinchey and Ms. DeGrette should stick to their guns. It's important to enlarge the nation's supply of natural gas, a relatively clean fuel. But where public health is an issue, federal oversight is plainly required.