

#59 A THIRD WAY - THE GREEN, SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY, Part Two

This column continues the discussion on alternatives to gas drilling in our communities. The take away message is ORGANIZE the alternative and SLOW DOWN the signing of leases for drilling until consensus is reached on what is best for the three constituencies, the individual landowner, the community and the environment.

Let's assume all three have sufficient standing that their requirements and interests are to be included as equal. This equality principle is important.

The next step is very important. It is essential that exploring shared goals and a commitment to cooperation and the general welfare be the central operational principles of activity on this issue that will transform our region.

Such a commitment is possible for a lot is held in common. For instance, groups with differing perspectives and directions have proven to be creative, persevering and committed to education and action. Groups favoring gas drilling leases and those opposing gas drilling have shown remarkable concern about environmental protection, community harmony and public health.

Nonetheless, there is increasing turbulence in community and neighbor relations. Gas drilling leases have been signed with huge differences in value. Stories of tens of thousands of acres available for gas drilling by combined groups of individual land owners galvanize opposition. Perhaps the most unsettling and dynamic force is the sense by nearly all on every side that gas drilling is inevitable.

Why is gas drilling inevitable? One set of reasons is that the resource is available, there is a strong demand for it, several companies are vying for contracts to extract it, and there is the potential for significant income to land owners. That's an impressive array of reasons for going ahead.

Let's take a closer look. The gas resource is not measured in quality or quantity. The demand for it is driven by disastrous national policy that must be eliminated, not extended for the health of the economy, environment and people. The companies seeking gas drilling contracts are not local, move from place to place, flip project, contract and resource interest. There is no credible basis for corporate accountability on transparency, prevention of damage or remediation. This is hardly the grounds for the inevitability of gas drilling.

Here is the short version of two alternatives. They should be considered seriously and concurrently.

- 1) There is enough clean, renewable energy from sun, wind and water to supply the combined energy of the Millennium Pipe Line Project, The New York Regional Interconnection Project, and gas drilling. It is supplied by natural services every day. It is highly measurable. It is a multi-billion dollar industry in our backyards and communities. It does not borrow from the past., It does not take from the future. It is clean. It contributes to public and environmental health, two of the biggest accounts in human society and planetary stability. It creates 40% more jobs, and good paying jobs with 21 century skills that match local talent, than conventional energy production. It partners with natural systems and bio-regions, protecting and enhancing their irreplaceable and essential services. Everyone knows all of this. Let's organize. We need new law, new regulations, new partnerships. We need the tax payer funded subsidies that flow in the tens of

- billions to fossil fuel developers. The talent and dedicated action of citizens so much in display should take this alternative seriously. It unites through local interest, local control, local benefit and is the hope of future generations
- 2) Gas drilling lease negotiations should include provision for very substantial community benefits, for school budget enhancement, community facilities and services, escrow accounts with open book accessibility at town halls and a variety of other funding commitments that meet local needs. A great deal is being given. The community is at great risk and all would agree the community has very substantial, essential unmet requirements. Community benefit funding should be at the center of lease agreements and the asking should be very substantial. Fossil fuel companies, the most profitable sector of the national economy, heavily subsidized by taxpayers, favoring resource wars rather than huge investments in renewable energy, pushing the world towards destruction, already have a very big accrued debt. Let's insist that they turn their talent to a more positive future and one that is designed in genuine partnership with local needs.