

Report Shows Huge Spending Increase by Gas Industry Lobbyists

by Sue Smith-Heavenrich

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Gas industry and special interest groups outspent environmental groups by four to one on issues relating to drilling and hydro-fracking during 2010. Those opposing the pair of bills proposing a NY moratorium on high-volume hydraulic fracturing spent \$2.87 million to sway state lawmakers. Organizations supporting the legislation spent a \$725,643 says a report released April 7 by Common Cause/NY.

At stake: NY State's policies regarding hydro-fracking, a technology that will have a profound impact on the future of our state. "It is imperative that those policies are not unduly influenced by large infusions of special interest dollars," said Susan Lerner, executive director of Common Cause/NY. The tremendous increase in industry lobbying underscores the need for the public to monitor the state's decision-making process, she explained, adding, "it raises serious questions about our elected officials' ability to remain independent and impartial."

Common Cause obtained bi-monthly lobbying reports filed by companies they identified as heavily involved with the state legislature. They analyzed lobbyist expenditures from 2005 through the first half of 2010 for both gas industry groups and environmental groups. Not only did the gas industry post an all-time high for lobbyist expenditures last year, but the increase over the past two years has been "precipitous", notes the report.

Chesapeake Appalachia, the nation's second largest producer of gas, outspent everyone, racking up close to \$1.2 million last year. Much of this was due to the substantial amounts that Chesapeake spent for advertising – \$836,386 on billboard signage, television ads and even a short film production.

By comparison the largest environmental group, Citizen's Campaign for the Environment, spent \$159,230. The uneven balance in spending on lobbying and advertising by pro- and anti-moratorium groups highlights the massive resources at the disposal of the natural gas interests. Not only do industry groups have more money, but they tightly focus their spending on gas extraction legislation. In contrast, environmental groups lobby on a diversity of issues.

Individuals hoping to sway their elected lawmakers are at even more of a disadvantage. Not only do they lack the financial resources of energy corporations, but they don't have a constant presence in Albany. The lobbyist offices for Chesapeake are conveniently located across the street from the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), while most of those living atop the Marcellus shale are separated from state policy makers by hours of driving.

Just how important is it to have the ear of your state representative? According to Assemblyman Gary Finch: very. A couple years ago Finch dropped in on a citizen discussion of gas issues held at the Spencer Grange. While farmers and local residents discussed "closed-loop drilling systems" and the costs versus benefits of various compulsory integration options, it was clear that the assemblyman was not up to speed on the issue.

But he did let his constituents know that gas industry lobbyists were filling the halls of the Statehouse. They are there every day, Finch said. If people want to have their voices heard, they needed to come to Albany, too. It was clear to those at the meeting that lobbying has already had an impact on how – and whether – state lawmakers protect "the people's interests".

You can read the Common Cause report online at
<http://www.commoncause.org/site/pp.asp?c=dkLNK1MQIwG&b=6721533>