

*American Public Deserves to Know Chemicals Used Near Their Water Sources*

*Washington, DC* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY), Congresswoman Diana DeGette (D-C), Congressman Jared Polis (D-CO), and U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) today introduced legislation in the House and Senate to protect drinking water supplies from harmful chemicals often used in natural gas drilling. The FRAC ACT -- Fracking Responsibility and Awareness of Chemicals Act, would close a loophole created in the Energy Policy Act of 2005, which Hinchey voted against, that exempted hydraulic fracturing from the Safe Drinking Water Act. The FRAC Act would also require the oil and gas industry to disclose the chemicals they use in their hydraulic fracturing processes. Currently, the oil and gas industry is the only industry granted an exemption from complying with the Safe Drinking Water Act.

"It's time to fix an unfortunate chapter in the Bush administration's energy policy and close the 'Halliburton loophole' that has enabled energy companies to pump enormous amounts of toxins, such as benzene and toluene, into the ground that then jeopardize the quality of our drinking water," U.S. Rep. Hinchey, Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and the Environment and Member of the House Natural Resources Committee, said. "Our legislation says everyone deserves to have safe drinking water by ensuring that hydraulic fracturing is subject to the protections afforded by the Safe Drinking Water Act. The bill also lifts the veil of secrecy currently shrouding this industry practice."

"Drilling for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale across much of Pennsylvania is part of our future," said Senator Casey. "I believe that we have an obligation to develop that natural gas responsibly to safeguard the drinking water wells used by 3 million Pennsylvanians. We already have private wells contaminated by gas and fluids used in hydraulic fracturing. We need to make sure that this doesn't become a state-wide problem over the next few decades as we extract natural gas."

"When it comes to protecting the public's health, it's not unreasonable to require these companies to disclose the chemicals they are using in our communities – especially near our water sources," said U.S. Rep. DeGette, Vice Chair of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. "Our bill simply closes an unconscionable Bush-Cheney loophole by requiring the oil and gas industry to follow the same rules as everyone else."

“Families, communities, and local governments are upset that the safety of their water has been compromised by a special interest exemption, and we join them in that frustration,” said U.S. Rep. Polis. “It is irresponsible to stand by while innocent people are getting sick because of an industry exemption that Dick Cheney snuck in to our nation’s energy policy. Many new sources of energy, including natural gas, will play an important role in our nation’s transition to cleaner fuels, but we must make sure this isn’t at the expense of public health. The problem is not natural gas or even hydraulic fracturing itself. The problem is that dangerous chemicals are being injected into the earth, polluting our water sources, without any oversight whatsoever.”

Hydraulic fracturing, also known as “fracking,” is used in almost all natural gas wells. It is a process whereby fluids are injected at high pressure into underground rock formations to blast them open and increase the flow of fossil fuels. This injection of unknown and potentially toxic chemicals often occurs near drinking water wells. Troubling incidents have occurred around the country where people became ill after fracking operations began in their communities. Some chemicals that are known to have been used in fracking include diesel fuel, benzene, industrial solvents, and other carcinogens and endocrine disrupters.

During the 110th Congress, U.S. Reps. DeGette and Hinchey introduced similar legislation in the House.