

Environmentalists lobby lawmakers for fracking ban

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Aeryn Boyd of Columbia is one of two "water walkers" who traveled from Western Maryland to Cove Point to show support for a ban on fracking.

Prince Frederick, MD - The annual "legislative evening" organized by the League of Women Voters of Calvert County included the usual presentations of wish-lists presented by local organizations to the Calvert County Delegation to Annapolis at the Tuesday evening, Nov. 15 gathering at Calvert Pines Senior Center. Community environmentalists also seized the opportunity to lobby the delegation—Maryland Senate President Mike Miller (D-Dist. 27) included—to support a ban on hydraulic fracturing, or fracking during the 2017 General Assembly session.

The parade of speakers during the "questions and comments" portion of the meeting was organized by an organization called Food and Water Watch. Currently, a moratorium on fracking in Maryland remains in effect. The two-year moratorium was passed last year and is due to expire next year. Fracking opponents claim the drilling technique is risky, yielding contaminated water supplies and making the ground vulnerable to earthquakes.

"Water is life," Michael Clark declared during his brief remarks at the session. Clark noted that he was arrested in 2014 for trespassing on Dominion Cove Point property. Natural gas, often obtained through hydraulic fracturing in the Marcellus shale, will be pipelined to the Calvert County liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant once a multi-billion dollar construction project has been completed. The LNG will then be exported to Asia. A portion of the Marcellus shale is located in Western Maryland.

Lila West of the Sierra Club told the lawmakers that the water supplies of several homes in Western Pennsylvania "have been poisoned by fracking." Additionally, West stated that songbirds native to the mountainous region contract lung disease from the fracked gas.

"We need to protect our community," declared Kim Alexander of Friendsville, one of two "water walkers" who have trekked from Oakland, MD to Cove Point to raise awareness about the dangers of fracking. Aeryn Boyd of Columbia, Alexander's walking partner, told The BayNet.com that the pair walked 313 miles. Despite the arduous journey on foot, Alexander had enough energy to begin her address with a song.

Lili Sheeline, a Washington, DC area real estate agent who resides in Port Republic, told the five lawmakers that "home values drop dramatically due to fracking. It impacts entire neighborhoods."

One humorous exchange occurred when Dunkirk resident Cindy Peil promised to send each legislator a copy of a Johns Hopkins University study on the adverse health impacts of fracking. Delegate Mark Fisher (R-Dist. 27C) thanked Peil for always emailing him information in a timely manner. "We don't always agree on everything," said Fisher. "I'm giving you a chance to change your mind," Peil responded.

On a more sobering note, Sierra Club member and North Beach resident Herb Wolf told the panel that the rise in autism in children might be traceable to the adverse impacts of fracking.

According to an October missive from Food and Water Watch, a recent OpinionWorks poll shows 57 percent of Garrett County residents surveyed support a ban on fracking.

Donny Williams of "We are Cove Point" said his organization not only favored a ban on fracking but wants to shut down the Dominion Cove Point project "before it starts. Safety has to be a priority." Williams repeated his organization's call for conducting a Quantitative Risk Assessment before the plant's new liquefaction unit is allowed to operate.

"We will listen to your words," Miller promised the speakers.

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