

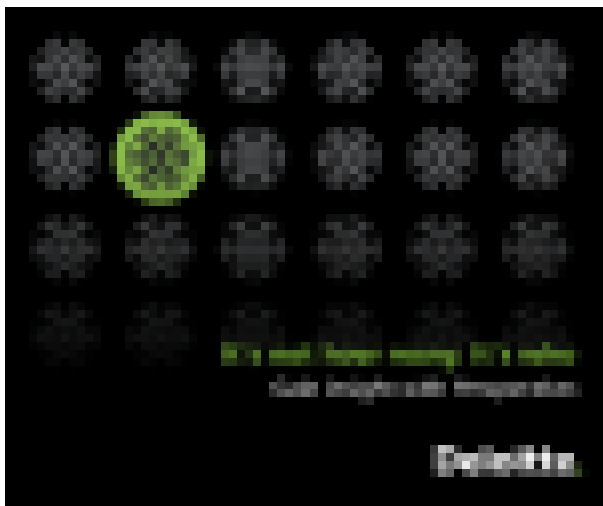
PERSONAL VIEW

Fracking concerns formed out of fear, despite facts

By **SPENCER ABRAHAM**

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In Ohio today, fear of the unfamiliar could stand in the way of progress, opportunity and continued economic recovery. Thanks to technological advancements, a vast, resource-rich formation far under Ohio's surface now is being safely unlocked. The formation, called Utica Shale, could hold untold billions of dollars in American oil and natural gas.



Unlike the Marcellus Shale formation — which is located nearby in states such as Pennsylvania and West Virginia, is shallower, and only touches the eastern sliver of Ohio — Utica Shale rests deep inside Ohio's border and represents an incalculable economic opportunity for the state and its people.

What stands between Ohio and these great resources? Fear.

Opponents of unconventional oil and natural gas development have suggested that there is much to dread from the tightly regulated process of extracting oil and natural gas liquids

from Utica Shale. Even the name for the drilling process conjures danger — horizontal hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking.”

Set aside the fear and rumors, for a moment, and let's consider the facts. Ohio sits above an immense formation of minerals. Utica Shale is rich with oil and natural gas

liquids. Safely recovering these natural resources will bring much-needed economic activity and prosperity to Ohio and its people.

Meanwhile, opponents of domestic energy development continue to fan the flames of fear in Ohio. Shale development is too exotic, they claim. The regulations are too weak, the opponents assert.

We need Washington and the EPA, rather than energy-producing states, to oversee the entire process, they maintain. All groundless fears, all aimed at halting development that creates jobs and strengthens our energy security.

What has been the result of these two conflicting views? Public confusion.

A January 2012 Quinnipiac University poll captured the dissonance. Ohioans said the economic benefits of shale development outweigh environmental concerns, 64% to 29%, although 72% say they would like to slow deep shale gas drilling until further studies can examine the effects.

What's at stake economically? A lot.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources conservatively estimates that between 1.3 billion and 5.5 billion barrels of oil and between 3.8 trillion and 15.7 trillion cubic feet of natural gas could come from Ohio's Utica Shale. The oil and gas industry says this development could create more than 200,000 jobs and generate nearly a half-billion dollars in new state revenues.

Local communities would benefit from development as well, as millions of dollars are pumped into their economies for infrastructure development. It's a cascading, private-sector-driven economic stimulus that touches a robust supply chain fueled by small- and medium-size businesses.

While shale development — like virtually every other industrial process — does indeed carry some risk, the relevant thing to keep in mind is that hydraulic fracturing has been successfully and safely employed in the United States for more than 60 years. In that time, some 80,000 wells have been fractured in Ohio alone, according to the Ohio Oil and Gas Association, and not a single case of drinking water contamination can be attributed to fracturing. It is a record to applaud and maintain.

Gov. John Kasich has chosen to exercise caution while remaining fiercely pro-economic development in his Utica Shale-related policies. It is a path that Ohio legislators would be wise to follow. As the governor forcefully articulated in his State of the State address: "We cannot let our fears outweigh the potential." He is absolutely right.

Delaying development of Utica Shale indefinitely, or even temporarily, serves no purpose other than to put Ohio behind other energy-producing states and to postpone economic renewal. Legislative leaders in Columbus have a responsibility to advance common sense policies aimed at protecting the environment while providing a regulatory pathway for the industry to move confidently forward.

Ohio legislators face a choice this spring as they consider critical legislation to determine the fate of Utica Shale development: They can give into fear, or they can side with progress, private-sector job creation, expanded opportunity for all and a nation that is more energy secure.