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Issue:

The detrimental effects of hydraulic fracking on the public health and environment.

Necessary background:

Hydraulic fracking is a process in which sand, chemicals, and million of gallons of water are pumped underground to separate rock to release natural gas and petroleum. This process is controversial because it requires a hefty consumption of water and is potentially detrimental for the parts of the U.S. currently suffering from drought. In New Jersey specifically, it is harmful to a host of environmental factors such as air quality, water supply, pollution, and earthquakes^[4]. Many local groundwater supplies could easily be contaminated by runoff from the fracking fluid. On the other hand, it provides another viable method of harnessing energy in the form of oil, a product which is in high demand. According to Brookings.edu, the fracking revolution of 2013 has dropped gas prices by 47% and has proven to be economically beneficial for all region of the US , from the drier regions of the west to the seasonal climate of the northeast [5]. While hydraulic fracking is an economically effective method, the funds used to finance this industry could be allocated to finance more environmentally friendly processes.

Evidence of Problem Existing:

This process began as an experiment in 1947 and was successfully implemented as a method for oil extraction in 1950^[4]. Since then, approximately 2.5 million “frac” jobs have been created, and this industry has significantly stimulated the economy^[3]. However, this process has exhausted funds that could have been used to finance projects which promote the use of green energy. Some critics believe that this method is detracting from the focus on the transition to environmentally friendly processes, especially in New Jersey.

Impact:

Chemicals involved in the process, such as crystalline silica, are carcinogenic [1]. For this reason it is considered a surface water and ground contaminant. It also poses other environmental issues since the physical practice triggers seismic activity, and exhausts immense volumes of water. Fracking is a highly controversial process and has been heavily scrutinized in the U.S. In 2012 Vermont was the first state to ban the practice, and the EPA assures surveillance of the issuance of drilling permits^[3].

Possible Solutions:

Conventional drilling and alternative energy sources currently pose less of a threat to the health of the general public, and thus fracking is seen, by some, as being too much of a risk with a lack of quantifiable benefits. As another means of tapping natural gas sources, focusing our efforts less on refining cheaper, alternative oil extraction methods and more on utilizing renewable energy sources could be one potential solution. In 2014, Governor Chris Christie vetoed the second bill (S1041/A2108) that would have banned the dumping of fracking waste in New Jersey^[2]. A potential course of action could include the passage of a bill into law that incentivizes the private sector to quit fracking deposits in the state.

Another solution, to quell the arguments of this in opposition to fracking, would be to limit the overall sites or gallons of oil per unit of time, to show that an effort is being made to accommodate the concerns of the more environmentally concerned populace. These limitations might slightly reduce profits, but will be a way of continuing the practice while compromising with the opposing side.

Sources:

1. http://www.nj.com/opinion/index.ssf/2014/08/editorial_gov_christies_veto_of_fracking_waste_ban_is_toxic_for_nj.html
2. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/chris-christie-fracking/>
3. <https://www.propublica.org/special/hydraulic-fracturing-national>
4. <http://www2.epa.gov/hydraulicfracturing>
5. <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/brookings-now/posts/2015/03/economic-benefits-of-fracking>