

ENVIRONMENT

Mark Ruffalo Attends Tension-Filled Hydrofracking Forum on UWS

By Anna Sanders 11/03 12:39pm



Assemblywoman Linda B. Rosenthal, Eric Goldstein from the Natural Resources Defense Council, former Commissioner of the NYC Dept. of Environmental Protection Albert F. Appleton, Deborah Goldberg from Earthjustice, and actor/activist Mark Ruffalo.

Last night, actor **Mark Ruffalo** was on hand at an Upper West Side public forum to voice his opposition to the proposal allowing hydrofracking in New York State.

Assemblywoman **Linda Rosenthal** arranged the forum as a means for her UWS constituents, along with other New Yorkers, to discuss the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's proposal to open the Marcellus Shale to natural gas drilling, which comes after the moratorium [on the practice was lifted in June](#). The DEC has opened its [Draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement \(SGEIS\)](#), which explores

the controversy surrounding hydrofracking, to public comment through Dec. 12.

Mr. Ruffalo arrived at the forum just ten minutes before its scheduled conclusion at 9 p.m., but questions, comments and general indignation at hydrofracking continued for 90 more minutes. Mr. Ruffalo, along with panelists and organizers, braved an antsy crowd as time to publicly comment ran out and one woman asked why there was no representative from the gas industry present.

After almost an hour of citizen questions and comments—including one representative for Manhattan Borough President [Scott Stringer](#)—a woman named Marsha walked purposefully to the microphone and said, softly defiant, “Since it was billed as an information forum, I’d like to know why there is no representative of the gas industry.”

By then it was around 10 p.m. and most of the audience had left, but a soft mumble-grumble filled the

hall at B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue on the Upper West Side where the forum was held. After the woman finished speaking—she had two more questions—Assemblywoman Rosenthal jumped right in, explaining the gas industry “does not need me to organize a forum for them.”

The woman, who tried to respond to Ms. Rosenthal, was met with cries of “enough of this lady” and “next”. (It should be noted that someone also said “let her talk, she’s a voice!”)

“Last night was about conveying the other side of the story about the potential dangers of fracking to our drinking water, our environment, our health and even our home values,” Assemblywoman Rosenthal said in an email this morning. “These are direct repercussions of fracking that the industry has refused to acknowledge, let alone discuss.”

Mr. Ruffalo also responded to the woman’s comment, which included questions about the validity of the panel’s claim that hydrofracking is environmentally *un*-friendly.

“They are not taking responsibility for what they should take responsibility for,” Mr. Ruffalo asserted. “Until that day comes, you cannot have an honest debate with them because most of what they’re saying is lies. And that’s the truth.”

The *Observer* caught up with Mr. Ruffalo after the forum ended around 10:30 p.m. and asked about the woman’s comments.

“I didn’t have a problem with it,” Mr. Ruffalo said. “I think there’s a lot of room in our democracy for that kind of conversation. And if you go down to Occupy Wall Street, you see that type of conversation happening everywhere. It’s a conversation that a healthy democracy can handle.”

During the forum, Mr. Ruffalo explained that since moving to upstate New York he has educated himself on the issue of fracking and become involved for the sake of his children and, well, America.

“It’s seeing how outrageous citizens of the United States are being treated,” Mr. Ruffalo added to the *Observer* on his way out the door. “They’re not being taken care of.”

Before Ruffalo arrived, the forum was mostly an information session. Panelists, including the Natural Resources Defense Council’s **Eric Goldstein**, former Commissioner of the city’s Dept. of Environmental Protection **Albert Appleton**, and Earthjustice’s **Deborah Goldberg**, informed over 300-person group on the politics and dangers of hydrofracking.

Hydrofracking, also known as simply fracking or hydraulic fracking, is a controversial method of natural gas extraction. The process involves pumping a mixture of water, sand, and an unknown cocktail of 336 chemicals (or more in some cases) into the ground to fracture shale deposits some 5,000-20,000 feet below the surface, which releases the natural gas in the shale. Mr. Goldstein said

that water quality, water quantity, air quality, land and habitat, public health and other resources may be jeopardized where fracking occurs.

“Folks can actually light the methane with a match in their faucet in the kitchen where methane gas has escaped from gas drilling activities,” Mr. Goldstein said at the panel.

Panelists said that hydrofracking can contaminate groundwater, which threatens to contaminate New York City’s water source in upstate New York. The Halliburton Loophole, which amended the Energy Policy Act in 2005, exempts the hydrofracking liquid from the Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, Clean Air Act and Superfund Act. While only a fraction of the fracking liquid, panelists affirmed the fluid is toxic and not “safe” as natural gas companies have said.

“The fracking fluid is actually poison,” said Mr. Appleton. “If you drank it you would almost certainly die.”

Other concerns addressed by the panel included fracking liquid disposal and the argument that opening up the state to hydrofracking would create jobs.

“Many of the jobs, as the SGEIS indicates, would initially go to folks from out of state who are experienced,” Mr. Goldstein explained. “You’re not going to get some unemployed kid who lives up in Chemung County and put him to work in this drilling equipment.”

A recording of the forum was filmed and will be submitted to the DEC as part of the public’s comments. On Nov. 30, the DEC will also hold a public hearing at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center.

asanders@observer.com

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