2013 January 13 by Tom Shepstone

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The remarkable similarity between the strategy of natural gas opponents and a recent event at a Middletown, New York, elementary school raises the specter of student indoctrination. The Times-Herald-Record participated in using fourth graders to perpetuate a political stunt intended to send a message to Governor Cuomo to oppose hydraulic fracturing, a subject about which, 9-year olds can hardly be expected to offer a mature opinion.

To All Parents and Grandparents:

This morning I became aware of something deeply troubling that should offend each and every one of you. You can find, at the bottom of this post, what was so upsetting to me. I expect you will find it equally disturbing. It's an article that appeared in the Middletown, New York, *Times -Herald-Record* describing an amazingly brazen case of elementary school indoctrination by natural gas opponents who seem to know no shame, assisted by the cooperation of the newspaper itself.

This manipulation of school children to deliver a public message attacking natural gas development is, I expect, no coincidence. I watched a two hour long show on Binghamton's Public Access TV Channel 4 on Christmas Eve. The scene was a packed Unitarian Church in Ithaca. New York, but it wasn't a holiday program. Rather, much of the discussion revolved around the Park Foundation funded Community Environmental Defense Council (CEDC) and strategies for preventing natural gas development at the local level. There was also discussion of how to flood the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation with comments on proposed new regulations (their target was 500,000 comments, but they fell far short).

All this was expected, but then the presentation took a sharp turn into new territory that deeply disturbed me as a parent and grandparent and should anger every school administrator, school board director, landowner and voter.

Dr.Sandra Steingraber, an educator herself, took to the pulpit and addressed the packed church and the entire viewing area reached by this public broadcasting station, and told them this:

I am interested, particularly, in recruiting teachers who have students because this is right over a holiday time when students are not around, that it might be possible that even now a high school student or a professor could assign a creative or critical thinking assignment to write one comment on a reg and send it in as a real-life form of argumentative writing or, you know, an evidence-based critical thinking assignment. It could be an alternate to a final exam question oo it could be an extra credit assignment for those who have semesters that carry on over the over Christmas. It could be something you assign for students to do over the holiday and if you are such a teacher I have written a “dear faculty” letter which I have sent out now over the web and am trying to get into the hands of as many a high school students and college professors as I can which has some ideas for classroom assignments that could be based on, you know, economics law, philosophy, political science, English communications, biology. You know, there are different regs that would work for different classes. I have some ideas about how that would work, you don’t have to make it up. So, I have copies for anybody who’s an educator. So, when I’m done here and we have a chance to break, come up to me if you are such a person or you’re interested and I will give you one of these to get you started.

Here she is, if you want to hear her in your own words .

I was, as a grandfather of 12, very disturbed by the entire episode, but most upsetting was this particular request. Never before, had I questioned what my children and grandchildren were being taught in our schools. I had always believed our schools were teaching Science, Math, English, History and Health.

Now here before me, on my television, I was learning that some educators are imposing their own personal political opinions on our children and the natural gas opposition is encouraging more of them to do so. Teachers play a very big part of raising our children and are in position to shape their very thoughts well into our children's future by virtue of their authority status within the classroom. Some, unfortunately, are abusing this precious privilege, instilling their own personal opinions and political agendas into the impressionably young minds of our children, thereby literally shaping the future of this country.

The Times-Herald-Record story is an example of this indoctrination mindset at work. Opposition to High Volume Hydraulic Fracturing in New York seems to be the Kool-Aid of the day for these full-time activists and protestors. Gas and oil extraction are their current target. Our children have become tools in their hands. Don't believe it? Well, just check out the article, reprinted below. I have blocked out the children's names to avoid further exploiting them.

Fourth-graders have concluded fracking's bad

By Steve Israel
Published: 2:00 AM – 01/13/13

If it were up to nearly four dozen future voters at a Middletown elementary school, fracking would be banned in New York — and the rest of the world.

Just listen to what those fourth-graders at Maple Hill Elementary School have to say about the controversial natural gas extraction method of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking:

"It could cause methane explosions, poison water and kill people. It killed cattle," says 9-year-old XXXXXX.

"Sometimes, because of fracking, earthquakes could happen," says 9-year-old XXXXXX, citing minor earthquakes in Ohio apparently caused by the underground injection of fracking waste.

Bottom line for the fourth-graders in the classes of XXXXXX and XXXXXX?

"We don't want to be poisoned by fracking," says 11-year-old XXXXXX.

These kids — most not more than 5 feet tall and 70 pounds, some with voices so small they must be reminded by teacher Hayes to use their big "Mrs. Hayes voice" — tackled fracking for an assignment to write an argumentative essay. I visited the school to meet the kids and see some of their essays.

Hayes chose the topic that has divided communities across the state because the kids had no preconceived opinions about fracking, which probably won't happen in Orange County, but could in neighboring Sullivan, which sits on the gas rich Marcellus shale. And even though she presented both sides of the issue through sources that ranged from CNN and "60 Minutes" to the gas industry's Energy In Depth Marcellus and the anti-fracking No Frack Almanac, all 44 kids reached the same opinion:

"Fracking is very bad for the earth," writes 9-year-old XXXXXX. "… **Gov. Cuomo should not allow New York State to frack."**

But the kids aren't just parroting slogans chanted at protests and public hearings during the four years the state has debated whether to allow the natural gas extraction method that uses a mixture of sand, water and chemicals to get at the gas. They did their research.

"According to the article 'Congressional Probe Finds Carcinogens in Fracking Fluids,' 650 cancer causing chemicals (carcinogens) are being placed into the earth," writes XXXXXX, 9.
"Even though landowners may get richer from the natural gas, carcinogens are being placed in the earth."

XXXXXX, 9, cites another problem with fracking, truck traffic — and its consequence.

“Traffic and noise will be increased,” he writes. **“Fracking will decrease tourism in areas of New York State.”**

And even though those for fracking stress its many safeguards — such as the concrete casing around wells that reach more than a mile underground, XXXXXX, 9, says accidents could still happen.

“The gas can leak and the chemicals can leak into the aquifer, and it can poison our water,” she says.

So while kids like XXXXXX, 9, know that fracking for natural gas could mean “cheaper energy,” and the possibility of “200,000 jobs” in the state, the children who may still be losing their baby teeth have this message for the man who may decide whether fracking is allowed here, Gov. Andrew Cuomo: Don’t approve it.

“We don’t want cancer at the age of 9,” says 9-year-old XXXXXX.

XXXXXX, 9, goes one step further. She urges the father of three girls to think ahead: **“Let the environment be good for the children of the future.”**

School Indoctrination