

The Southern New Jersey Development Council (SNJDC) would like to applaud Governor Christie's conditional veto of A-2576 and his recent decision to place a one-year moratorium on hydraulic fracturing- or "fracking"- at the state level. Fracking, the use of water, sand and chemicals to crack underground rock formations and allow gas to flow freely is widely used in the Marcellus Shale region.

By way of background, the SNJDC is a member-based organization charged with promoting sustainable economic development in South Jersey by working with the region's economic development professionals to promote long-term responsible regional economic investment, development and growth in South Jersey.

Energy, in all forms, has always been a major issue for our state, region and the members of our organization. In our most recent Regional Outlook we included energy sources as one of the seven most important challenges facing South Jersey. The fact is, there is a massive supply of natural gas nearby that if developed properly will provide a low cost energy source for Southern New Jersey for many years. Energy is one of the most expensive costs to business; a steady supply of natural gas could help in lowering the cost of doing business throughout the State.

The one-year moratorium is intended to give two federal agencies the necessary time to complete studies on the process of fracking. The Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency are each studying fracking, but the Energy Department report won't be complete until November, while the EPA's is expected to be released sometime next year.

We share the Governor's concerns with this drilling technique: ensuring clean water and protection of the environment; while at the same time seeking a cleaner burning fuel source to help achieve greater energy independence. However, any decision on whether to ban fracking outright must be based on sound empirical data as it carries the potential for far reaching effects.

The SNJDC believes that the Governor has made a prudent move by seeking a temporary ban on the practice of fracking while awaiting the results of the ongoing federal studies.

Marlene Asselta is the President of the Southern New Jersey Development Council.