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To combat climate change and promote sustainability, an energy policy must take into account the true impact of natural gas. The draft policy, like many New England-based discussions of natural gas usage, fails to account for the enormous environmental damage caused by: 1) the extraction of the fuel by hydraulic fracturing, which involves the injection of numerous toxic chemicals into the earth, wastes huge quantities of fresh water, and apparently leads to seismic activity not previously experienced in the affected regions; 2) the leakage at every point in the process from the drilling site to the final destination of large quantities of methane, a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, into the atmosphere. Although methane burns with fewer harmful emissions than does coal or oil, the process of bringing it to market is no less damaging, and it should not be viewed as an acceptable long-term replacement for other fossil fuels.

Because of current market conditions, which do not reflect the true costs of gas, and the general tendency to overlook the negative impact on the environment, it is fashionable to view natural gas as a highly desirable “bridge fuel.” New Hampshire will certainly need to continue to rely on this fuel for some time, but state energy policy must be designed to move forcefully away from all fossil fuels. The current push to greatly expand the pipeline infrastructure, if unchecked, will effectively lock the region into over-dependency and overuse of this resource and will discourage efforts to improve efficiency and promote alternative forms of energy that are renewable and truly clean. It is essential that natural gas be properly evaluated as a major part of the problem we are trying to solve, rather than as the solution.

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