

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici
Subcommittee on Environment
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Joint Hearing of Energy and Environment Subcommittees:
“Review of Federal Hydraulic Fracturing Research Activities”

April 26, 2013

Thank you, Chair Lummis and Chair Stewart. I am pleased to have representatives from the federal agencies appearing before the joining subcommittees today to discuss their multi-agency plan to research hydraulic fracturing and unconventional oil and gas. Hydraulic fracturing has led to a significant expansion of drilling for oil and gas in the United States, unlocking huge natural gas reserves that have reduced the cost of natural gas domestically and resulted in economic improvement across many industries.

The successful development and application of this technology, however, has been accompanied by an insufficient understanding of the potential impacts that hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking”, might have on our environment and our health. The debate about environmental health and human safety issues has escalated over the years, as we have heard concerns related to groundwater contamination, induced seismicity events, well integrity, and potential negative impacts to the health of workers, just to name a few. According to the Energy Information Administration, shale gas is estimated to supply almost 50 percent of our gas in 20 years. If that prediction is accurate, it is even more critical that this boom in natural gas production be accompanied by a clear development of best practices to identify and curb potential negative impacts. It is my hope that the multiagency research plan will address these very important questions in order to insure the continued prosperity of the industry while preserving the health and safety of the general public.

Hydraulic fracturing emerged as a commercial success in large part because of federal investment in fracking technologies. The success the government had in aiding the fracking industry is an example of how public-private partnerships can work to advance science and engineering and turn nascent technologies into an economic driver. Although I am a strong proponent of reducing our country's dependence on conventional gas and oil, I hope that we make similar commitments to developing clean energy technology, with a similar focus on preserving human and environmental health. Diversifying our energy supply and protecting public health go hand in hand.

In closing, I am pleased that the Administration is calling upon the expertise of our federal agencies to ensure that we have the best scientific information available, use cutting-edge technology, and develop best practices for extracting this plentiful resource in a manner that is safe for our workers and the environment. I look forward to hearing how the agencies plan to research and address these issues.