

## **OPENING STATEMENT**

**Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson**

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Review of Hydraulic Fracturing and Practices

U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Thank you, Chairman Hall, for holding this important hearing.

As Texans, Chairman Hall and I know well the importance and the impact of oil and natural gas development in this country. Our economy has relied on fossil fuels to power our manufacturing base, our transportation sector, our agricultural sector, and more. And, for the foreseeable future, the country will continue to develop these resources and technologies to achieve our energy, economic, national security, and, in some cases, our environmental objectives. Unconventional shale gas produced through hydraulic fracturing may very well play an integral role in meeting these goals.

However, we must acknowledge that the development of any fossil resource can have significant negative environmental impacts. I am not speaking of the environment for its own sake, but of the very oceans we fish, the air we breathe, and the water we drink. Like oil and gas, these too have real economic value. While few people get rich from clean air and water, everybody benefits. Likewise, nobody should have the right to take those away, regardless of the potential for financial profit. This strikes me as something on which most all of our constituents would agree.

The Congress has acted in the past to protect these commons through legislation such as the Clean Air Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the results have been just that – cleaner air and safer drinking water. However, in 2005, anticipating the boom to come, Congress awarded drillers with an exemption from the Safe Drinking Water Act for hydraulic fracturing.

Today we will hear from some Members and witnesses that such regulations make it difficult and more costly to extract unconventional oil and gas, and that industry does not need more stringent regulations to protect public health and the environment. Maybe we do, or maybe we don't. We simply do not have enough data yet to say, nor will we if industry is not forthcoming in disclosing the chemicals it uses and if Congress does not allow the EPA to do its job of determining the risks of these practices.

EPA's work is just the beginning. In the next few years efforts by the Department of Energy, various state regulators, and interdisciplinary academic projects, such as the one being undertaken by the University of Texas Energy Institute, and others will add to the overall understanding of the impacts of this new suite of technologies known as hydraulic fracturing. And, let us be clear that, contrary to industry claims that it has been doing this safely for 60 years, this is a new suite of technologies that may have very different and lasting environmental impacts, especially when compounded by the sheer scale of operations we see today.

If there is conclusive evidence that the chemicals and practices used by the drilling industry contaminate water supplies, Congress has a responsibility to acknowledge these new risks and protect the public. I

believe the science will ultimately speak for itself, and I sincerely hope that hydraulic fracturing proves to be as benign as the industry claims.

No matter what the outcome, let us not be fooled into believing that we can rely on the industry, out of sheer benevolence, to change the way they operate or to implement cleaner, but potentially more costly, technologies. With very few exceptions, it has never worked that way, and likely never will. Without regulations to level the playing field, they simply do not have the financial incentive to do so.

It is not alarmist to exercise precaution here, nor is it unwarranted. Too often we are reminded of how flawed industry practices, inadequate training and technologies, poorly designed systems, shortsighted risk assessments, lax governmental oversight, and sheer bad luck can contribute to tragedies in the energy industry. Major disasters such as Fukushima and the Deepwater Horizon serve to remind us of the risk of truly catastrophic, and previously unimaginable, events. But, they also overshadow the frequency of smaller safety incidents and spills, as well as the lower-level pollution that escapes regulators' attention every day. We do not have to accept this as the cost of our energy addiction. We can do better.

That being said, I want to focus on what I believe is a guiding principle of this Committee, which is that technology should continue to evolve, and, in the case of drilling for unconventional oil and natural gas, become more efficient, safer, environmentally sustainable, and economically viable. I want to hear from this panel how advancements in everything from casing technologies to the recycling of water and the greening of chemicals can protect public health while still producing domestic energy sources.

Additionally, I want to hear what role the federal government should play in both developing and understanding the impacts of these technologies. The Department of Energy was instrumental in developing new technologies to make extraction of unconventional natural gas from shale formations feasible, and I would like to hear how such federal resources could now be leveraged to clean up these processes.

So I look forward to learning about the study that Congress has directed EPA to conduct on the impacts of hydraulic fracturing on water. While I had hoped that EPA would have been able to cover some important issues related to hydraulic fracturing other than drinking water, such as air quality, it is clear that this may have to be covered in a different study.

As the President has said, natural gas has the potential to be a viable domestically-sourced option for significantly decreasing air pollution while reducing America's reliance on oil. I agree with the President, but I don't believe we have to compromise our values and violate the rights of Americans to cleaner water and air to get there. If there are problems with hydraulic fracturing, let's acknowledge them and work to advance technologies that remedy them.

I look forward to this and future hearings on this subject.

Thank you.