

OPENING STATEMENT  
RANKING MEMBER BRAD MILLER  
Energy & Environment Subcommittee hearing  
***Fractured Science – Examining EPA’s Approach to Ground Water Research: The Pavillion Analysis***

Thank you Chairman Harris

The stated purpose of this hearing is to examine the methodology, quality assurance, the peer review process and the like of an EPA study that links hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” and groundwater contamination near Pavillion, Wyoming. EPA conducted the study in response to requests by citizens in the area. The draft report is the product of three years of research. The report is subject to a public comment period, followed by a peer review. EPA has extended the public comment period from 45 days to 90 days at the request of industry. Public comments are due by March 12, 2012. EPA is also now soliciting nominations for disinterested experts to serve as peer reviewers. Once selected, the peer review panel will have thirty days to complete their work.

In other words, the Pavillion study is a work in progress.

The Pavillion study does not call for any regulation of fracking. The study is part of “risk assessment,” not “risk management.” Risk assessment informs risk management. Once we know the risks, EPA will then weigh of the economic benefits and the potential public health consequences of fracking to determine what safeguards, if any, are appropriate to develop needed natural gas resources while protecting the environment and public health.

Although the industry and their political allies dismiss concerns about fracking as uninformed hysteria, their refusal to provide basic information about their operations and their efforts to hinder independent scientific research like the Pavillion study cannot be reassuring to citizens living near fracking operation. The industry has refused to disclose the chemicals they inject into the earth, claiming that the information is proprietary, their “secret sauce.” But the draft Pavillion study is not the only study to find ground water contamination, and at least one instance of surface water contamination, near fracking operations by chemicals not ordinarily found in nature and known to be part of the secret sauce. Some of the chemicals are known carcinogens.

In short, the public concern about fracking seems very reasonable.

The question is not whether we are “pro-drilling” or “anti-drilling.” The question is whether we will drill with our eyes open. The public wants to know if fracking is safe, and they’re entitled to know. But the industry and their political allies just say, in effect, “move along, there’s nothing to see here.”

The integrity of scientific research at EPA is properly the subject of this subcommittee’s interest, although none of the Republican witnesses today appear to satisfy the requirements of disinterested expertise to serve as peer reviewers. With no disinterested scientists as witnesses, a reasonable question is whether this hearing is really just a big wink and nod to the industry that the majority is on their side no matter what.