

America "awash in natural gas" but will enviros stop its production?

Mark Tapscott, San Francisco Examiner, 1-21-10

Fossil fuels account for 84 percent of all the energy America uses now and they will account for 78 percent in 2035, according to U.S. government projections that include the most likely levels of growth in renewable energy source like wind and solar.

That in turn means we are going to need all the oil and gas we can find and produce for the foreseeable future. What is far from certain, however, is whether environmental extremists and their allies in Congress, the federal bureaucracy and the court system will allow us to do so.

That question is being focused right now in an increasingly noisy debate about whether the federal government should take over regulation of a drilling technique that has been used for 60 years in opening up plentiful new reserves of natural gas in Pennsylvania, New York and West Virginia.

The drilling technique is hydraulic fracturing. Drillers inject fluids - 99.5 percent water - into rock formations, thus creating horizontal fissures that make it possible to recover trillions of cubic feet of natural gas that would otherwise never be captured.

The environmental extremists claim hydraulic fracturing threatens to pollute drinking water and therefore should be regulated - i.e. killed altogether - by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

The Institute for Energy Research (IER) released a useful report today that not only debunks such claims, but also provides a wealth of facts and concise analysis of why it is essential that drillers in the U.S. be allowed to continue to use hydraulic fracturing to produce natural gas (and oil, too).

Thomas J. Pyle, IER's president, offers this summary of the issue and its importance:

“Considered within the context of an administration almost singularly focused on denying Americans access to energy resources offshore, America’s onshore shale resources was an inevitable development – but one that could not be possible without advances in horizontal drilling and a key technology known as hydraulic fracturing.

“Unfortunately, national activists understand the potential of this technology as well and are currently engaged in an aggressive campaign to block the responsible development of homegrown energy – this time, not by attacking the carpenter, but by taking away his tools.

“The irony here is that hydraulic fracturing has for decades been considered an environmentally sensitive technology – not only because 99.5 percent of the solution it uses is water and sand, but because it allows operators to produce 10 times the amount of energy by drilling one-tenth the number of wells. And there, my friends, is exactly the reason why the technology is coming under fire: It’s safe, it’s effective, and it’s used to produce fossil fuels.

“At a time when Washington begins to focus on job creation and the economy, the domestic coal, oil and natural gas industry can no longer be ignored by the Obama Administration and Congress. Our domestic energy

industry, and the environmentally sound technologies used to extract these energy resources – like hydraulic fracturing – have the potential to put thousands of Americans back to work. Any ‘jobs bill’ that fails to recognize this fact, will shortchange the American people.”