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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Doug Lamborn
Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources
Oversight Hearing on
“Unconventional Fuels, Part 1: Shale Gas Potential.”
June 4, 2009

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I want to thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this important hearing today on the potential of the Nation's shale gas resources and the role they can play in meeting our country's energy needs now and in the future.

While we're here to discuss the importance of this unconventional resource in meeting part of our current and future energy needs, I found it interesting to learn that the first natural gas well completed in the U.S. was in New York state more than 185 years ago and was a shale gas well.

Today shale gas and other unconventional natural gas sources such as tight sands and coal bed methane provide more than 47 percent of the natural gas consumed in the U.S. annually. According to the Energy Information Administration, by 2030 these unconventional natural gas resources will provide 56 percent of the natural gas consumed by the United States.

All of this was made possible through development of the Barnett Shale in Texas in the 1980s and 1990s, as you alluded to, where innovative drilling techniques, horizontal drilling, combined with the safe long standing practice of hydraulic fracturing, demonstrated that this unconventional fuel could be produced on a large scale economically.

Development of the Barnett shale gas play paved the way and sparked interest in other shale gas basins throughout the U.S. – the Bakken in South Dakota, the Haynesville in Louisiana, and the Marcellus in the Northeastern U.S. to name a few.

While this is a great opportunity for the country to have access to a significant reserve of clean burning fuel well into the future, for some unfamiliar with the oil and gas industry, it has raised concern about the practice of hydraulic fracturing.

Hydraulic fracturing has been used by the oil and gas industry since the late 1940s. More than 1 million fracturing jobs have been completed in the U.S. since the technique was first developed. And there have been no demonstrated adverse impacts to drinking water wells from the “fracking” process or by the fluids used in the process.

Testifying before us today we have Mr. Scott Kell, President of the Ground Water Protection Council which, recently completed two reports for the Department of Energy: “Modern Shale Gas Development in the United States: a Primer for the U.S.” and “State Oil and Gas Regulations Designed to Protect Water Resources” and, Mr. Lynn Helms, Director of the Oil and Gas Division for the North Dakota Industrial Commission.

I anticipate that their testimony will address some of the concerns that people have about the practice of hydraulic fracturing and the level of environmental protection and regulations specific to oil and gas development.

I also look forward to hearing from our other witnesses: Mr. Duncan, Mr. John and Mr. Appleton.

Before I finish my remarks I would like to thank the chairman of the subcommittee for considering holding a hearing on oil shale as part of the series on Unconventional Fuels.

In the future, oil shale will play a significant role in our energy mix. While estimates vary, the United States Geological Survey says the oil shale in Colorado, Wyoming and Utah contains

more than 1 trillion barrels of recoverable oil -- a crucial fuel for the transportation sector. And I'm not just talking about cars -- but planes, trains, trucks and ships. As some people have pointed out there are no hybrid jet engines.

I believe for the United States to improve both its economic and national security, we will have to develop more of our own resources -- renewable resources such as wind and solar, other renewable resources such as hydropower, geothermal, biomass, and nuclear -- but also our conventional and unconventional energy resources.

We must recognize that we will need to use our fossil fuels well into the future. Whether we like it or not we and the rest of the world are highly dependent on these fuel sources and they are fully integrated into our society. These are the energy resources that fuel our Nation's economy and the economy of the world. This is an undeniable fact.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing today and exploring this important topic in the future. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on this great national resource.