

OPENING STATEMENT
RANKING MEMBER EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON
House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
*Full Committee Business Meeting on the Issuance of Subpoenas to the United States
Environmental Protection Agency*
&
Markup of H.R. 2850, the “EPA Hydraulic Fracturing Study Improvement Act”

August 1, 2013

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Today we are meeting to authorize the issuance of a subpoena and also to mark up H.R. 2850, “To require certain procedures in the conduct by the Environmental Protection Agency of its study of the potential impacts of hydraulic fracturing on drinking water resources.”

Let me start off by saying that this is truly a sad day in the storied history of this Committee.

At the start of this Congress, I had high hopes that you would lead us in a bipartisan fashion, as befits the history of the Committee. I have been sorely disappointed. This subpoena resolution is the culmination of a year of hyper-partisan activity which is unprecedented for our Committee. In that regard, the partisan vote to report out the Majority’s NASA Authorization two weeks ago was an unfortunate milestone. Mr. Chairman I am unaware, in the entire history of this Committee, of a NASA Authorization ever being reported out of Committee on a party-line vote. Never.

Somehow we are managing to top that unprecedented level of partisanship today with this dreadful subpoena resolution. There are so many problems with both this resolution and with the process you have used to get here, that is difficult to know where to start.

Perhaps I should start with the numerous mischaracterizations contained in your July 22 letter to the EPA as well as in the Majority’s markup memo. In both of these documents it is insinuated that both the Harvard Six Cities Study and the American Cancer Society Study are bad science or “secret science.” However, you provide no evidence to support your claims. None. Of course, neither of those claims are true. In fact, these studies are seminal works which are widely respected in the scientific community. Moreover, there has been extensive peer review, re-analysis, and validation work on these studies. And these facts should come as no shock to you, as the EPA has pointed this out repeatedly.

The notion that these studies are “EPA secret science” is also false. First of all, neither of these studies were conducted by the EPA. Second, none of the data cohorts used in these studies are secret. They are, however, confidential.

And for good reason. These cohorts contain the personal health information of over a million American citizens. This information should be highly protected. However, legitimate scientific researchers do have access to this data, and scores of research teams from around the country have accessed this data to conduct scientific research.

You should know this, Mr. Chairman. You are the Chair of the Committee on Science. Science. And yet, at so many turns this Congress you've exhibited a baffling disregard for the scientific process and the academic and government scientific community in our country. This is just another example.

And for what do you seek this data? Just yesterday, you readily admitted that you intend to pass this confidential data on to third parties. Who Mr. Chairman? What legitimate scientific researcher can't already access this data? I have to assume you will be passing this data to - excuse my language - industry hacks. To so blatantly be doing the bidding of the polluting industries is simply mind boggling. If the data is not going to be provided to industry, either directly or indirectly, Members need to know to whom you will be sending it.

You know for years the tobacco industry tried every trick in the book to gain access to the American Cancer Society data so their own salaried hacks could cast doubt on the link between smoking and cancer. Thankfully, they were largely unsuccessful, and I hope today's efforts will also fail.

I want to be clear, this is not legitimate oversight and this is not an appropriate role for our Committee. Our job is not to undermine public health at the explicit behest of polluting industries.

Like the subpoena resolution, H.R. 2850 is a continuation on the same theme of political micromanaging of the scientific process. I'll have more specific comments in my statement on the bill, but for now I'll simply say that it doesn't seem very well thought out.

Mr. Chairman, we can and should do better than this. I sincerely hope that as we move forward, the Majority will cease their senseless attacks on the scientific process and the scientific research community. I yield back.