

August 10, 2011

The Honorable Steven Chu, PhD
Secretary of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As scientists from 22 universities and institutions in 13 states, we are writing to express our concern over the lack of impartiality on the Natural Gas Subcommittee of the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board that is studying ways to make hydraulic fracturing safer. We urge you to modify the panel's membership so that the panel can make recommendations on hydraulic fracturing that are unbiased and scientifically sound.

In our work, we believe in reducing individual biases in evaluating the merits of scientific or technological ideas. The current panel does not meet this standard. Six of the seven members have current financial ties to the natural gas and oil industry. These include: chairman John Deutch, Stephen Holditch, Kathleen McGinty, Susan Tierney, Daniel Yergin and Mark Zoback. These conflicts of interest make it appear that the subcommittee is designed to serve industry at taxpayer expense rather than serving President Obama and the public with credible advice.

The committee appears to be performing advocacy-based science and seems to have already concluded that hydraulic fracturing is safe. We believe that the best science should be done first to determine whether increased unconventional natural gas production is sufficiently safe – from the individual water well to climate impact – and that policy should follow.

Five months before you appointed your subcommittee, the Environmental Protection Agency appointed a Science Advisory Board to examine similar issues. To reduce financial influences, the agency instituted a number of procedures, including an evaluation of the candidates' financial ties. As a result, the panel is perceived as impartial. We would like to see similar standards for the Energy Department's Natural Gas Subcommittee.

At a minimum, we ask that John Deutch step down from the subcommittee and that you replace him with a person with no financial ties to the natural gas and oil industry. We also request that you balance the panel with other independent members and that in its evaluation the panel most heavily weight relevant peer-reviewed sources.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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