The Pros and Cons of Fracking

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Hydraulic Fracking is an unprecedented opportunity in the midst of impending economic crisis. While fracking of shale deposits does pose inherent risks to the environment, stringent regulation and public accountability can serve to mitigate the damage. The current state of regulation is insufficient to address fracking because it was designed to handle the dangers of traditional oil and natural gas drilling. Even though current policy is inadequate, fracking is still the way to go because the economic implications outweigh the environmental drawbacks. It is imperative that America grasp this moment by the horns because we posses natural advantages that can be used to rejuvenate our stagnant economy and establish energy independence. In the end, you regret the things you didn’t have the courage to do more than the mistakes you made along the way. It is out of both necessity and opportunity that America should embrace fracking and addresses the measures that have to be taken to ensure a safe future.

In terms of current data, the damage fracking does is ambiguous, because the “facts” vary from source to source. That being said, there is some objective science on the matter and the economic interpretations may overstate or underestimate the impact fracking has, but they are conceptually sound. Most proponents of fracking try to downplay the associated risks, and thus contribute to the damage fracking does (Conventional policy for Unconventional Drilling). The fracking industry must first admit there is a problem in order to fix it and that starts with a holistic view of the argument.

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The real matter that needs to be tackled is not weather or not we should frack but how we should go about doing so responsibly. It stands to reason that such

a complex problem is not universally resolved by any single solution, but rather by a comprehensive set of solutions. These solutions should encompass federal policy, state regulation and mandated public transparency in order to fully encompass the entire situation. The fracking industry is already making steps in the right direction, mostly in response to media backlash, regardless it will only take some slight but strict corrections to turn it into a win-win for everyone.

For all the economic miracles this new industry works it also airs it’s fair share of dirty laundry. Hydraulic fracturing is a process by which a vertical well is dug and then horizontal offshoots are constructed to expose as much shale to the well as possible. Once the well is constructed, a cocktail of chemicals, water and sand is pumped in at high pressure to extract the natural gas from the rock. These chemical cocktails are usually concocted of undisclosed agents that have proven themselves a health and environmental hazard when accidentally leaked (Chris Mooney). When you consider that millions of gallons of this mixture are used per well, and billions of gallons are used annually, it gives you an idea of the risk to the surrounding communities. Even if the mixture was not toxic it’s self, “Flowback” can contain radioactive elements from underground, and microbial infestations of wells can occur if the mixture does not contain powerful antibacterial (Conventional policy for Unconventional Drilling). In instances where a well did in fact leak, of which there have been plenty, catastrophic consequences were imparted on local

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agriculture, and public welfare was severely threatened. To this day, fracking companies are dragging many inhabitants of contaminated land through legal battles. These conglomerates are determined to sweep their indiscretion under the rug with a little store bought justice. Notice, however, that the common denominator here is a human hand in all the harm caused, as a result of negligence or greed.

For all of the dangers fracking poses, it promises to more than compensate in economic dividends. Most importantly, shale fracking has in large part acted as a buoy that kept America’s sinking economy just above water. Another large incentive is the prospect of energy independence. America is slated to produce 50% of the world’s natural gas by 2020 and is currently enjoying the largest stockpile of crude oil in 84 years (Jeff McMohen). In 2006 the U.S. produced 69.4 quadrillion Btu’s of energy; since the shale revolution, America produced 78.1 Btu in 2011. In 2011, fracking contributed 36 billion dollars worth of GDP growth and is slated to eclipse that with 118 billion by late 2015. Of course an entire industry does not just spring up overnight completely isolated from the outside world. This financial boom was accompanied by increases in employment from 118,400 oil/gas employees in 2003 to 198,400 in December of 2012 (Kevin Hasset). Another consideration in the fracking-industry debate is that natural gas is the least greenhouse gas intensive fossil fuel source of all. Natural gas produces about 50% of the carbon dioxide emissions of burning coal, which led to a 10% decrease in CO2 emissions between 2010 and 2012 as energy demands went up (The Economist). This is perhaps the

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first time ever that energy consumption was inversely correlated to greenhouse gas emissions.

The question still stands, what do we do? Fracking is still degrading land, water and air quality in most of the locations where it takes place. The solution comes in many pieces, but is uniform in objective. For starters, it is important that fracking be forbade on sensitive or watershed land. The government must update their clean air standards to include methane (the main component of natural gas, and a green house gas 20x more potent than CO2) whose emission is largely ignored(Unchecked Fracking Threatens Health). The policies regarding well construction must be updated for fracking to require excessive designing and construction, complete with fail-safe contingencies to ensure a leak is prevented at any cost. This update should be accompanied by the closing of oil and gas loopholes in clean air and water mandates made to restrict contamination by other hazardous waste. One of the most important steps in a working solution is demanding public disclosure of chemical solutions, and allowing for public participation in permitting, to prevent fracking from encroaching on communities where it is not welcome. If these measures are taken, fracking should constitute a very elegant solution to America’s economic troubles and secure energy independence for generations to come.

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