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Big Green: A Big Green propaganda film that sparked a dud of a House hearing

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When the documentary "Gasland" premiered at the Sundance film festival in January, it won a special jury prize and created quite a stir. Showing Colorado water taps bursting into flames will do that.

But Gasland is more agit-prop than factual documentary. The film's target is "fracking," a process oil and natural gas engineers have used more than a million times in this country to harvest otherwise unreachable oil and natural gas deposits deep below ground.

The process involves pumping a solution that is 99 percent sand and water, plus a few trace chemicals, thousands of feet underground at high pressure, which creates fractures in the rock formations that allow oil and gas to flow to collection points.

Fracking has been targeted in recent years by the environmental movement that seeks to shut down all or most oil and natural gas production in America, just when vast new stores of both have been found that could help restore U.S. energy independence and cut consumer energy costs dramatically. Thousands of new jobs would also be created, especially in economically depressed areas of Pennsylvania, New York, West Virginia and Kentucky.

Environmentalists claim fracking pollutes groundwater, but government and industry officials say no examples of the threat have ever been documented. And indeed, the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission investigated those famous flaming taps and concluded they were caused by "naturally occurring methane."

Fracking is regulated by state environmental officials like John Hanger, who heads the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. Hanger called Josh Fox, who made "Gasland," "a propagandist" and says the film is "fundamentally dishonest."

According to the Philadelphia Inquirer, Hanger is no industry tool, he's "a liberal who spent years in the mainstream environmental movement" before he went to work for the state.

But flaming water taps got the attention of U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce Chairman Henry Waxman, D-Calif., who soon after "Gasland's" premiere announced hearings to examine fracking's alleged dangers.

The committee held hearings in March, "just days after EPA's top drinking water official said he had not seen documented evidence of contamination caused by fracturing and that state regulators were doing a good job overseeing the process," according to the New York Times.

Rep. Waxman and his environmental movement allies want to shift fracking regulation to Washington where the practice can be more easily stopped. But that approach was rejected years ago by EPA in a 2004 study that found no evidence of fracking-caused contamination. Carol Browner, who headed EPA under President Clinton, reached a similar conclusion in 1995.

Curiously, after issuing subpoenas to eight energy companies, Waxman dropped his fracking probe, pending results of yet another federal study in 2012.

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