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## Fracking Takes Center Stage at House Gas Caucus Event

by Amy Harder

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The House Natural Gas Caucus is ramping up its legislative strategy this Congress, and at the top of its list is dispelling criticism surrounding hydraulic fracturing, a controversial method of extracting natural gas.

Caucus staffers were briefed on Monday by industry lobbyists, with most of the time spent on the science behind, controversy surrounding, and the critical use of hydraulic fracturing, dubbed “fracking.”

Oil tycoon T. Boone Pickens will brief the caucus on Wednesday on his plan to incentivize natural gas as a fuel for large trucks and semis. House leadership, driven by Rep. **John Sullivan**, R-Okla., is working on legislation, which could be introduced this week.

Most of the air in the room—both literally in Monday’s briefing and figuratively in terms of the industry—is being taken up by fracking. It is a process by which a rock containing shale is fractured using an intense injection of water and chemicals. Once the rock is fractured, the shale gas is extracted. It has been used in the industry for decades but has faced renewed criticism given the recent discoveries of shale gas in Appalachia, Louisiana, and Texas.

“Right now the expectation is that there is an added 100 years of natural gas supply from shale formations,” said Lee Fuller, vice president of government relations at the Independent Petroleum Association of America, at the briefing. “Without fracturing we would not be able to access that gas, and that’s why it has become such a target point in this debate.” Other interests at the briefing included the American Petroleum Institute and Chevron.

Congressional Democrats and environmental groups worry about



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Pickens: Pumping gas.

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fracking and are calling for more federal regulation of the process to ensure the chemicals are safe. They contend that the water and chemical mix used in the process is contaminating drinking water supplies, which could in turn endanger public health and the environment.

Sen. **Robert Casey**, D-Pa., introduced legislation in the last Congress calling for companies to disclose the chemicals they use, and so far the industry has been generally receptive to that and has sought to pre-emptively release information. Pennsylvania is one of the states poised to gain the most from the shale discoveries both in terms of jobs and new energy sources.

The Environmental Protection Agency is conducting a study on the risks associated with fracking and expects to have initial results by late 2012. Until then, the members of the gas caucus, led by Reps. **Tim Murphy**, R-Pa., and **Dan Boren**, D-Okla., are urging the administration to hold off on any federal regulation until that study is complete.

