

Opening Statement – Senator Lisa Murkowski
Natural Gas Roundtable on Shale Development: Environmental Protection and Best Practices
May 23, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And, thank you panelists for participating in our third and final natural gas roundtable to talk about the basics of shale development: industry practices – how we access and produce our vast natural gas resource base; and environmental protection – ensuring responsible development so we may continue to develop this abundant, affordable and clean energy source to help fuel our economy.

The shale gas boom has clearly been a game changer for our country. Only a few years ago, our natural gas supplies were thought to be declining with domestic consumption on the rise. In fact, we held a hearing in this committee to talk about importing and re-gasifying LNG. But, here we are today – and things sure have changed.

This has all been made possible by advances in technology – specifically, the combined use of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing – which has allowed us to safely and economically unlock vast natural gas supplies stored in shale formations across the country.

These formations differ greatly in geology and geography. The Marcellous, Bakken, Utica, Eagle Ford, and other shale formations all have unique characteristics, which makes uniform regulation difficult if not counterproductive.

I will note the work BLM did to respond to concerns associated with their initial proposed rule on hydraulic fracturing, and EPA’s work looking at potential impacts to drinking water supplies. I still question the need for these regulations and instead support strong state-based regulatory systems for natural gas development. I continue to believe that the states are best positioned to address and respond to environmental and other community concerns within their borders.

Advances in technology have not only allowed us to access these shale gas resources but reduce environmental impacts. In my state, the surface footprint of oil and gas development has decreased drastically over the 40+ years of development on the North Slope. Though natural gas development in the Lower 48 is different from what occurs in Alaska, the principle is the same – technology is continuing to develop and improve. For example, fracking fluid sourced from the food industry is being used and becoming more widespread, lessening concerns about chemical contamination.

We must be deliberative and thoughtful in how we proceed in dealing with issues impacting natural gas development. Efforts must be reasonable, based on sound science and not duplicative or overly burdensome, particularly in these tough economic times. This resource is too important to our future economic development and energy security to move forward in any other way.

Thank you again for your participation today. I’ll turn to you now to share your story, and provide your thoughts on what the federal government is doing right, what it could be doing better and your recommendations for future involvement in natural gas development.