American Association of Petroleum Geologists
An International Geological Organization

Edward A. "Ted" Beaumont
President, 2012-2013

December 12, 2012

The Honorable Ralph Hall, Chairman
Committee on Science, Space and Technology
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hall:

I am writing on behalf of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG), the world's largest scientific and professional geological association. AAPG works to advance the science of geology and communicate that knowledge to the geologic community and to society.

I commend you for your distinguished leadership of the Committee on Space, Science and Technology and your support for energy research and development to strengthen American energy security and global competitiveness.

AAPG supports the Tapping America's Energy Potential through Research and Development Act of 2012 (H.R. 6603), which you have recently introduced, because it promotes needed research and development (R&D) of oil shales, other unconventional oil and natural gas resources, and produced water utilization.

Oil and natural gas production in the U.S. has grown significantly in the past decade. This growth is the result of scientific and technological advances enabled by significant research investments by government and industry.

Future unconventional oil and natural gas production and environmental safety depend on sustained R&D investments. The path from R&D success to commercial deployment is long and government involvement is essential in the early days when any potential economic benefit is unclear.

Mitchell Energy and Development Corporation paved the way for commercial production from the Barnett Shale in Texas using hydraulic fracturing. However, senior company managers have noted the important role that government-funded R&D played in their ultimate success. Those R&D investments began almost 40 years ago, when many claimed shale gas production was impossible and these investments a waste of federal funding.

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A strong government R&D program is also important to providing essential research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students who will be the future geoscience, engineering, and energy workforce. There is a looming, potential shortage of qualified workers for the petroleum industry and regulatory agencies, which could negatively impact U.S. energy security and environmental protection.

Research experience in graduate school is essential for student geoscientists and engineers. Government-funded R&D provides these experiences for students and their faculty advisors. It is a vital part of supporting the nation's research infrastructure and scientific and technological competitiveness.

Your inclusion of produced water R&D in this legislation is important. Developing new technologies to reclaim and reuse the water produced as a byproduct of oil and natural gas production is an important priority in arid western states and heavily populated eastern states.

AAPG also supports State-based regulation of hydraulic fracturing, a position that you share and an area that will benefit from the R&D proposed in H.R. 6603. States with growing oil and natural gas production will require increasing numbers of well-educated regulators and a foundation of scientific data on which to base their regulations. Both are enhanced by this legislation.

Prudent investments in unconventional oil and natural gas and produced water R&D will indeed enhance U.S. energy security and affordability. Thank you, again, for your leadership on this issue, Chairman Hall.

Please contact Edith Allison, our policy director in Washington, DC with any questions. (phone: 202-643-6533, e-mail: eallison@aapg.org).

Sincerely,

Ted Beaumont

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AAPG President

cc. Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson, Ranking Member