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EPA chief: 'Fracking' can be OK

GALLOWAY TOWNSHIP — U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson told energy industry leaders and environmentalists Wednesday that natural gas fracking can be done without harmful impacts, presenting “an historic opportunity” for the country in terms of energy development and job creation.

“I think that fracking as a technology is perfectly capable of being clean. I do. But it requires people who are doing it and innovators who use the technology to take some time to make sure that it’s done right. And it requires smart regulation, smart rules of the road,” Jackson said.

The comments at a Richard Stockton College energy conference were some of the strongest from Jackson in support of fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, which involves harvesting shale reserves by blasting underground rock formations with pressurized water and chemicals.

Jackson signaled a leaning last year when testifying before a U.S. House Oversight Committee when she said wasn’t aware “of any proven case where the fracking process itself has affected water, although there are investigations ongoing.”

Jackson told the audience at the college that the investigations continue. She said an

EPA report on ground water impacts from fracking is due by the end of the year.

Jackson said the federal government has a partner regulating the drilling with individual states and noted that some states are better than others in vetting safety issues, such as New York, where officials “are very thoughtfully evaluating the impacts,” she said.

“People are rightfully asking, what is my government doing to ensure that my water, my air, my health are protected? Those are fair questions to ask,” she said.

If the power companies do their part to minimize pollution issues, the country will benefit, Jackson said.

“We get a huge return on the investment,” she said.

Jim Walsh, a director of Food & Water Watch, said he disagreed with Jackson’s evaluation of fracking, but noted, “Safety is a subjective term. We’ve seen tremendous

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damage from fracking in different places.”

“I appreciate that the EPA has been playing a much larger oversight role in fracking, but it’s far short of what’s needed,” said Walsh, who attended the conference. “She pointed out that New York is working in a responsible way, studying the issues, as opposed to fracking going on elsewhere without good regulation. She was on target there.”

Jackson was the keynote speaker at the “Energy 40/40” conference — a look at the past 40 years of energy history and a forecast of the next 40 years — sponsored by the college’s William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy.

Panels later will cover topics including infrastructure, energy portfolios, efficiency in buildings, nuclear energy and alternative sources of energy on a large scale.

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