



Writer’s Block

# Thoughts On Fracking

BY WILLIAM KERR  
For the Press & Dakotan

When I first read about the large underground deposits of gas in shale deposits being mined with new technology and that enough had already been located to supply the world for another hundred years I thought “how great!”

Later, when I read about the process called “fracking” (fracturing), in a periodical that still does investigative reporting (*The Hightower Lowdown*) and actually reports it (July 2010), I had to think again. (Of course, the major media, owned mostly by the 1 percent, have little or no incentive to print the truth.)

What’s involved is drilling a hole down from 5,000-20,000 feet, cementing a pipe into the hole, then forcing millions of gallons of water and sand slurry, laced with hundreds of chemicals down the pipe to fracture the layers of shale and let the gas out into the pipe. However, not all of the gas goes up the pipe. Some escapes into the soil and eventually reaches the surface, often entering aquifers and water wells from which many communities get their drinking water. (Not everyone in our country lives on a river.) Some is absorbed in the water and comes out of the faucets of some people’s homes, sometimes as flames! (This is no joke, it really happens!)

Methane releases from drilling add to the global increase in climate change and pollute the air with asthma causing smog. “For example, a six-county region of Texas with heavy fracking has a startling 25 percent asthma rate for young children,” the *Lowdown* reported. In heavily fracked locations, the EPA has put up “No Drink” warnings.



William KERR

Also, some of the chemical-filled slurry escapes into the aquifers and wells that supply drinking water carrying such things as benzene, naphthalene, ethylbenzene, toluene and xylene. It may then bring up deep-earth contaminants with it such as arsenic, lead, chromium, barium and strontium. (Approximately 632 chemicals are involved all together: 25 percent can cause cancer, 40 percent can affect the brain and most are toxic in other ways.)

But, “how do they get away with this you might ask?”

A past vice president named Cheney who was the CEO of Halliburton before becoming VP convened fellow Halliburton employees to help him rewrite the national energy policy. The result has been called “The Halliburton Loophole”:

“Paragraph (1) of section 1421 (d) of the Safe Drinking Water Act (U.S. C 300h (d) is amended ... [to exclude] the underground injection of fluids or prepping agents (other than diesel fuels) pursuant to hydraulic fracturing operations related to oil, gas, or geothermal production activities.”

It was not for nothing that VP Cheney was paid by Halliburton a total of \$1 million while he was serving our country as VP! Halliburton is the leading “fracking” corporation, doing \$1.5 billion/year of fracking business. Overall, more than 90 percent of gas wells in our country are being fracked. So far, only a small portion of the northwest of our state is in the gun sights of the crackers.

My wife has always said, “If it is possible to destroy our planet, we human beings will find the way!” It looks to me like fracking might just be one of the ways to do that.

# What If We’re Wrong On Iran?

BY ROGER Z. GEORGE  
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As the U.S. contemplates whether to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities, intelligence community leaders should be asking themselves a question: What if we’re wrong?

That question wasn’t asked — or at least wasn’t answered — in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq war, with devastating consequences. Before giving up on containment or deterrence policies and undertaking a “preventive war” against a nation that has not attacked the United States, we should be as certain as possible of the evidence.

Iran today presents an even murkier intelligence picture than Iraq did in 2003. We have not had a diplomatic presence there since 1979 and have had to rely on intelligence collected through technology, international inspectors and foreign intelligence relationships. In the absence of solid intelligence, the intelligence community has had to fall back on its own assumptions or mind-sets regarding Iran’s nuclear program and make educated guesses about how its government would probably operate its programs. Our assessments of Iran’s military capabilities have had to rely in part on our understanding of how American weapon developers conduct tests and develop weapons. Such analytic assumptions have and can again lead to incorrect conclusions.

So what can be done to avert another military strike based on devastatingly wrong intelligence estimates? How can we avoid terrible mistakes, followed by commission investigations and finger-pointing?

First, we must set extremely high standards for evidence. Intelligence professionals must challenge themselves to look at their forecasts skeptically, asking whether underlying assumptions about Iranian behavior and technical talent are well founded. Policymakers should encourage this kind of critical thinking and be attentive to signs of faulty logic or flawed intelligence.

Second, the U.S. must not over-rely on information gathered and supplied by foreign governments. Such intelligence can be useful, but it is often provided as much to influence action by American policymakers as to provide unbiased and accurate information. Much of the foreign intelligence used to analyze Iraq’s supposed development of weapons of mass destruction, for example, was self-serving, biased or flat-out fabricated. The U.S. is almost certainly the target for influence operations designed to shape American perceptions of the Iranian nuclear program. We should be especially wary of reporting that fits what we are expecting to see and challenge that reporting vigorously.

Third, U.S. intelligence personnel should be kept at arm’s length from policy discussions, particularly those

involving military options. Being too close to the decisions made by the Bush administration more than likely contributed to then-CIA Director George Tenet’s assertion that the U.S. had “slam-dunk” evidence that Saddam Hussein was actively developing weapons of mass destruction. Senior intelligence officials are not immune from wanting to be team players, and if a policy team is looking for information to support a desired action, this can skew an intelligence agency’s views on the information it has gathered. James R. Clapper, the U.S. director of national intelligence, would be well advised to run all intelligence about Iran’s nuclear weapons program through a rigorous “red-teaming” exercise, involving outside experts who have no ax to grind or connections to the current administration or its policies.

Fourth, the intelligence community should never be called on to make the case for intervention, as was the situation in 2003, when so-called white papers on Iraq’s WMD program were fashioned by the intelligence community to support Bush administration policies. Such reports are not rigorous intelligence assessments but rather advocacy pieces devoid of the important qualifiers that coordinated intelligence reports should carry.

Finally, the intelligence community should immediately, if it has not already done so, prepare candid assessments of the effect military strikes against Iran’s nuclear facilities could have on both Iranian politics and regional stability. In 2003, such assessments proved to be prescient, but they were completed only after the decision had been made to invade Iraq. Consequently, they had virtually no impact on decision-makers, who had convinced themselves that Iraqis would greet us as liberators and quickly restore the functioning of their society and economy.

Needless to say, the decision to attack another Islamic state would carry consequences far beyond reducing Iran’s military potential, and the intelligence community needs to analyze those consequences currently with its analysis of intelligence regarding Iran’s nuclear intentions.

These steps will not guarantee that intelligence used to reach the important decisions regarding Iran will be perfect. Clearly, it will not be. However, the intelligence community should not repeat mistakes it made in 2002 and 2003, nor allow itself to become the scapegoat for decisions that properly reside with the nation’s political and military leadership.

*Roger Z. George, a former national intelligence officer, teaches at the National War College in Washington. He wrote this for the Los Angeles Times.*

## YOUR LETTERS

### Health Care Concerns

**Bruce H. Brazelton, Yankton**

The Affordable Patient Health Care Act (Obamacare) has been in effect now for some time and while there are some beneficial aspects to the law, there are several major areas of concern.

First, our major health care problem is exorbitant and excessive costs. These are not addressed, and in fact the law RAISES health care costs. Sections 9008, 9009, and 9010 add fees for drugs, insurance premiums, and medical devices. Estimates range from 15 percent to 50 percent increases in insurance premiums as a result of the law.

Secondly, the law violates our religious liberties because it mandates “reproductive services.” Catholic officials have said they would close their fa-

cilities before they would murder one innocent baby. One can only imagine what this will mean for Sacred Heart hospital in Yankton.

Thirdly, Medicare recipients are now being asked such questions as to whether or not they own firearms, keep ammunition, etc. These are NOT relevant to health care. One can only guess the intent; it is not to protect our Second Amendment rights!

Finally, the uncertainties in these new regulations are causing employers to delay expansion and hiring at a time when we desperately need jobs in this country.

Additionally, under Section 1501, illegal immigrants are exempt from this law.

It is time for either repeal or major revision of this law, so please keep this in mind as we vote. Please support candidates who will effect this revision.

# THE PRESS & DAKOTAN

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## OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

# Mortgages And A Simpler Tax Code

**KENOSHA (Wis.) NEWS (Sept. 30):** Now that the housing market has started to recover a little bit, more people are looking at the role tax policy might have had in the housing bubble that burst several years ago and dragged the nation’s economy into a recession.

The average taxpayer gets \$559 from the tax deduction for mortgage interest, according to the Tax Policy Institute

Of course, the bigger your mortgage, the bigger your potential interest deduction. There actually is a ceiling on the size of a mortgage that qualifies for this tax subsidy, but it’s absurdly high: \$1.1 million. That high a ceiling is only a limiting factor for the highest income earners, the ones who qualify to borrow that much money. For most of the housing market, there is no ceiling on the size of a mortgage that qualifies for favorable tax treatment.

The Obama administration is reportedly considering a proposal to drop the mortgage interest deduction for those whose incomes are higher than \$250,000. The effect on the budget deficit of that proposal would not be very significant, according to some analyses.

It also wouldn’t be fair. If national policy intends to support home ownership with a tax deduction, the benefit should apply to everyone.

A better way to change the disproportionate mortgage-interest benefit now available to wealthy taxpayers is to limit the size of the mortgages that qualify. The current limit could be gradually reduced over a period of years to a more reasonable limit that could vary with regional housing markets. San Francisco’s housing market is expensive compared to Kenosha’s, so the limits shouldn’t be the same. ...

Eliminating the mortgage interest deduction would be a big bite out of tax policy, and it might not be a proposal that could generate much support, but candidates keep saying we should have a simpler tax code. ...

Couldn’t we at least take a baby step?

# The Boy Scouts And Abuse

**THE CLARION-LEDGER, Jackson, Miss. (Sept. 27):** Add the Boy Scouts of America to the list of trusted institutions that failed sexually abused children.

The Scouts’ past behavior, like that of the Catholic Church and Penn State University, shows how easily child molesters can get away with vicious crimes and how easily respected institutions can convince themselves that keeping crimes a secret is acceptable.

From 1970 to 1991, the Boy Scouts failed to report hundreds of suspected sexual abusers to authorities and in some cases “urged admitted offenders to quietly resign,” sending them off with clean recommendations, according to an analysis by the *Los Angeles Times* of the Scouts’ once confidential files. The Scouts’ failure meant predators were free to stalk and abuse more innocent children, and some did.

The Scouts say that what matters most are its policies today, not files going back decades. And that’s true. ... But since the pre-1992 records were forced into the open as a result of litigation, the Scouts have not released their more recent records or combed through those files to cull and report suspected abusers.

This is troubling because the older records, which came to be known as the “perversion files,” teach a timeless lesson. The Scouts, like other institutions, often saw molestation as more of a public relations problem than a crime. These institutions tried to ensure that molesters wouldn’t abuse children on their turf but had little compunction about sending them off to abuse others. ...

So why haven’t the Scouts gone back through their post-1991 files to bring more abusers to justice? Because, a spokesman says, the files “are an incomplete record set that are not used to track reporting.”

That’s not much of an excuse for an organization that offers a crime prevention merit badge. ... Until recently, the organization’s top leaders would not have qualified to earn it.

## TODAY IN HISTORY

**By The Associated Press**

Today is Thursday, Oct. 4, the 278th day of 2012. There are 88 days left in the year.

**Today’s Highlights in History:** On Oct. 4, 1957, the Space Age began as the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite, into orbit. James R. Hoffa was elected president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. The family comedy series “Leave It to Beaver” premiered on CBS.

**On this date:** In 1777, Gen. George Washington’s troops launched an assault on the British at Germantown, Pa., resulting in heavy American casualties.

In 1822, the 19th president of the United States, Rutherford B. Hayes, was born in Delaware, Ohio.

In 1861, during the Civil War, the United States Navy authorized construction of the first ironclad ship, the USS Monitor.

In 1887, the *International Herald Tribune* had its beginnings as the *Paris Herald*, a European edition of the *New York Herald*.

In 1931, the comic strip “Dick Tracy,” created by Chester Gould, made its debut.

In 1940, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini conferred at Brenner Pass in the Alps.

In 1959, the Soviet Union launched Luna 3, a space probe which transmitted images of the far side of the moon.

In 1960, an Eastern Air Lines Lockheed L-188A Electra crashed on takeoff from Boston’s Logan International Airport, killing all but 10 of the 72 people on board.

In 1970, rock singer Janis Joplin, 27, was found dead in her Hollywood hotel room.

In 1976, agriculture secretary Earl Butz resigned in the wake of a controversy over a joke he’d made about blacks.

In 1980, fire broke out aboard the Dutch cruise vessel *Prinsendam* in the Gulf of Alaska, forcing the 520 people aboard to abandon ship; no deaths or serious injury resulted. (The ship capsized and sank a week later.)

In 1991, 26 nations, including the United States, signed the Madrid Protocol, which imposed a 50-year ban on oil exploration and mining in Antarctica.

**Ten years ago:** John Walker Lindh, the so-called “American Taliban,” received a 20-year sentence after a sobbing, halting plea for forgiveness before a federal judge in Alexandria, Va. In a federal court in Boston, a laughing Richard Reid pleaded guilty to trying to blow up a trans-Atlantic flight with explosives hidden in his shoes as he declared his hatred for America and

his loyalty to Osama bin Laden.

**Five years ago:** Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, defiantly vowed to serve out his term in office despite losing a court attempt to rescind his guilty plea in a men’s room sex sting. Former city maintenance worker John Ashley shot five people in a law office in Alexandria, La., killing two of them; Ashley was shot and killed by police following a standoff. South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il pledged to pursue a peace treaty and end their countries’ decades-long standoff.

**One year ago:** Three U.S.-born scientists, Saul Perlmutter, Brian Schmidt and Adam Riess, won the Nobel Prize in physics for discovering that the universe is expanding at an accelerating pace. The NBA canceled the entire 114-game preseason schedule because a new collective bargaining agreement had not been reached with the National Basketball Players Association.

**Today’s Birthdays:** Country singer Leroy Van Dyke is 83. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Sam Huff is 78. Actor Eddie Applegate is 77. Actress Felicia Farr is 77. Author Jackie Collins is 75. Author Roy Blount Jr. is 71. Author Anne Rice is 71. Actress Lori Saunders (“Petticoat Junction”) is 71. Baseball manager Tony La Russa is 68. Actor Clifton Davis is 67. The former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, is 66. Actress Susan Sarandon is 66. Blues musician Duke Robillard is 64. Playwright Lee Blessing is 63. Actor Armand Assante is 63. Actor Alan Rosenberg is 62. Actor Christoph Waltz is 56. Actor Bill Fagerbakke is 55. Music producer Russell Simmons is 55. Actress-chris Wendy Makkena is 54. Musician Chris Lowe (The Pet Shop Boys) is 53. Country musician Gregg “Hobie” Hubbard (Sawyer Brown) is 52. Actor David W. Harper is 51. Singer Jon Secada is 51. TV personality John Melendez is 47. Actor Liev Schreiber is 45. Actor Abraham Benrubi is 43. Country singer-musician Heidi Newfield is 42. Actress Alicia Silverstone is 36. Actor Phillip Glasser is 34. Rock singer-musician Marc Roberge (O.A.R.) is 34. Actress Rachael Leigh Cook is 33. Actor Jimmy Workman is 32. Rhythm-and-blues singer Jessica Benson (3lw) is 25. Actor Michael Charles Roman is 25. Figure skater Kimmie Meissner is 23.

**Thought for Today:** “He who confers a favor should at once forget it, if he is not to show a sordid, ungenerous spirit.” — Demosthenes, Greek statesman (384 B.C.-322 B.C.).

## FROM THE BIBLE

*Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis*

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