

Disinformation on Natural Gas: Pro-Fracking Spin on Public Radio, Brought to You by Qatar

By [FAIR](#)

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Theme: [Environment](#), [Media Disinformation](#), [Oil and Energy](#)

The [April edition](#) of the monthly public radio program *America Abroad*, “*Global Energy and Innovations*,” sounded like an infomercial for the natural gas “fracking” industry. Which, in essence, is what it was.

The show, which is distributed by Public Radio International (PRI), began with host Madeleine Brand declaring:

Thanks to a breakthrough in the technology known as “fracking,” the hydraulic fracturing of rock, the United States is enjoying a boom in cheap natural gas.

She went to say that “supporters argue that the new technology not only brings new jobs but also provides cleaner energy than coal.”

And what do fracking opponents say? That’s unclear; the counterpoint to fracking’s boosters—“natural gas will do everything we want it to do,” as one soundbite put it—is the observation that “some experts” think that cheap gas means “there’s less incentive to develop clean, renewable energy.”

The tilt in the episode isn’t that surprising, considering who was paying for it. The show was underwritten by the Qatar Foundation International, controlled by the ruling family of the oil-rich nation, and the Stuart Family Foundation, funders of an [array](#) of conservative think tanks and advocacy groups.



LNG tanker (cc photo: Amanda Graham)

Qatar’s oil company, QPI, is a world leader in exporting liquefied natural gas

(Bloomberg, [12/13/10](#)) and partners with Chevron in “export-oriented LNG facilities.” QPI just invested \$1 billion in Canadian natural gas fields, whose fracking-extracted products would be primarily marketed to North American consumers. And QPI recently signed a major deal with ExxonMobil to construct a \$10 billion natural gas export terminal in Texas (Bloomberg, [5/9/13](#)).

Are you surprised to learn that ExxonMobil and Chevron are both among America Abroad’s general funders?

The show’s lead interview was with MIT professor Henry Jacoby, co-chair of an MIT Energy Initiative study titled “The Future of Natural Gas.” Jacoby heralds fracking as a clean technology, discounts renewable energies as currently unrealistic and supports the U.S. market switch to exporting liquefied natural gas.

The segment doesn’t reveal that the MIT Energy Initiative’s governing board and founders include executives from major gas and oil corporations such as Chevron, BP, Shell and Saudi Aramco. Multiple members of the research team were also working for oil and gas companies during the project (Public Accountability Initiative, [3/13](#)).

One of the main messages of the program is that fracking can be a “bridge to the future,” a fossil fuel to exploit until renewables are finally ready to be widely used. As Brand put it, several high-profile solar industry failures “came at the same time fracking technology was fueling a boom in American natural gas production.”

The show also tapped former Shell CEO John Hofmeister, who now runs a group called Citizens for Affordable Energy, to send the same message: Sure, clean energy would be great, “but in the meantime, the most affordable are clearly the traditional hydrocarbons, as well as nuclear, as well as hydropower. I’m talking about oil, natural gas and coal.”

And it was especially revealing to see how the show engaged criticism of fracking. “The controversy over fracking,” Brand commented, “as well as concerns about climate change, in part, led to a renewed and invigorated interest in all things green in political circles.” That led to a mention of Al Gore’s climate activism—but only to make the point that this “politicized the issue of climate change and, by extension, the renewable energy industry to the point where it harmed that industry’s ability to connect with Republicans in certain states.”

America Abroad should have done a better job of balancing the guest list of this program to include more critical voices. But that would have meant directly challenging the business interests of the show’s funders.

ACTION:

Ask America Abroad ombud Jeffrey Dvorkin to investigate the show’s report on fracking and the multiple conflicts of interest of the show’s funding.

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