There are a lot of unanswered questions about natural gas and fracking. A recent report by Resources for the Future sheds light on some of the answers. RFF is unusual among Washington think tanks — an honest broker that uses expertise to try to answer hard questions. The report reaches three important conclusions. The first conclusion relates to impacts on water. In terms of water pollution, the report finds little evidence of impacts on the quality of surface water, at least in the Marcellus shale. It finds unanswered questions, however, about methane in drinking water wells. The second conclusion is about the impact of cheap gas on climate change. The answer here is mixed. In the near term — up to 2020 — expanded use of natural gas reduces carbon emissions because it displaces coal rather than renewables and nuclear The reason is that renewable use is shielded by renewable portfolio standards. This assumes, of course, that there isn't enough methane leakage to outweigh this effect. The RFF report seems to lean in the direction of recent studies finding leakage to be minimal, but concludes that we don't yet know the answer. But the third conclusion is less favorable to natural gas. Natural gas provides no help at all in 2030. Present-day renewable standards no longer shield renewables, and natural gas now drives out cleaner energy sources. A carbon tax might make the difference, depending on its size. All of these conclusions are undoubtedly subject to dispute. But at least the RFF report gives a sense of how the evidence looks to at least one set of independent experts.