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In Denton, Voters Approve Fracking Ban By Wide Margin

By [DOUALY XAYKAOTHAO \(/PEOPLE/DOUALY-XAYKAOTHAO\)](#) & CHRISTINA ULSH • NOV 5, 2014

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Supporters of Denton's fracking ban celebrate at Dan's Silver Leaf after hearing the proposition passed.


CHRISTINA ULSH / KERA NEWS




Denton made history Tuesday night, becoming the first city in Texas to ban fracking within city limits. The vote passed 59 percent to 41 percent, to the surprise of even the supporters of the ban.



There was a lot of cheering at the celebration for ban supporters.



When the crowd finally quieted down, leaders of Frack Free Denton, the group that spearheaded the campaign to prohibit hydraulic fracturing were still wide-eyed, jaws dropped. Some were crying.



The KERA Radio Story.

Adam Briggie, a professor at the University of North Texas, and a board member of the Denton Drilling Awareness Group, said the industry should be scared.

“All that money, they outspent us 10 or 15 to 1 when you add it all up,” Briggie said. “They got all the endorsements from the official organizations. What we saw was grassroots democracy beating the old money, the old industry, people who care about profits above health.”

The industry is on notice, Briggie said.

“You can’t come around and push people around, not even in Texas,” he said.

Randy Sorrells of Denton Taxpayers for a Strong Economy doesn’t see it the same way. His family has rights to the resources under their 100 acres within Denton’s city limits. He said the passing of the fracking ban is bad for Denton.

“Between the city and the state, and the mineral owners, there will be tremendous lawsuits,” Sorrells said. “The economic impact will be tremendous. It’s just hard to fathom what it’s all going to do.”

He said Denton is a college town, that many of the young voters had nothing to lose, unlike his family. And he plans to sue.

The Texas Oil and Gas Association filed a petition for injunctive relief Wednesday, (<http://keranews.org/post/following-denton-fracking-ban-texas-oil-and-gas-association-files-injunction>) saying a fracking ban is inconsistent with state law and violates the Texas Constitution.

On Tuesday night, Republican Michael Burgess, who was re-elected to Congress, said: “Denton has made a decision, good for Denton, but I don’t think it will affect energy policy on the broader perspective across the country.”

Burgess' Congressional district includes Denton County and parts of Tarrant. Burgess serves on the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

“There may be some court activity. There may be some activity at the level of the state legislature,” he said. “Certainly, you have to respect the right of the people to have their voice heard.”

The bigger picture, Burgess said, is the U.S. is on the verge of becoming an energy exporter -- and Texas, the nation’s top producer of oil and gas, is leading that charge.

Update: Shoulder-to-shoulder at an election watch party in Dan's Silver Leaf, a music venue, supporters of the Denton fracking ban cheered, cried and hugged after finding out the proposition passed, making hydraulic fracturing illegal within the city limits.

The ban won with about 59 percent of the vote.

Original post: In Denton, where voters are deciding whether or not to adopt a fracking ban within city limits, a steady stream of voters are filing into the Martin Luther King Jr. Recreation Center.



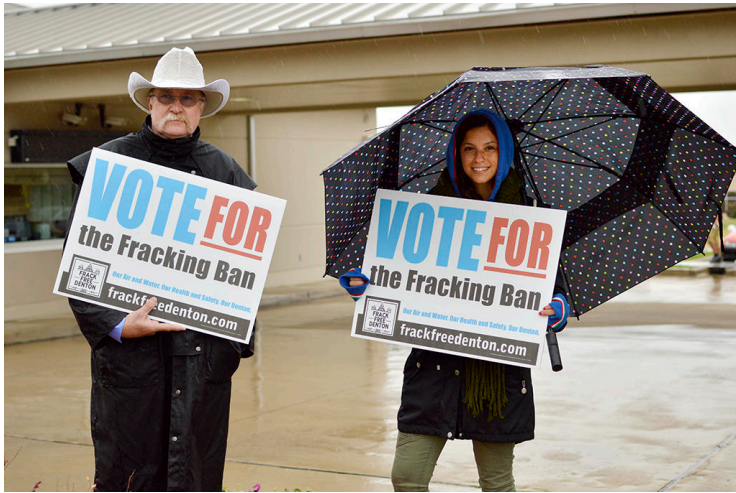
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1:18

At the Denton polling stations, voters talk about the drilling ban.

Jacqueline Hawk proudly put her "I voted" sticker on her shirt as she walked out of the center, trying to avoid the rain. Nearby was a woman wearing a Frack Free Denton T-shirt, and two men with signs that read "Support Responsible Drilling." Hawk says she voted for the ban.

"I just don't think they've done enough research on the effects that it has," she said. "I'm afraid 100 years from now, our children and grand-children are going to feel the repercussions of us injecting stuff into the earth. Just seems like a bad idea."



(https://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/kera/files/styles/x_large/public/201411/141104campaign0023.JPG)

Laura Trevisani and Ron Watson say they are standing in the rain outside of the DATCU polling station to help decode the confusing language of the ban proposition on the ballot.

CREDIT CHRISTINA ULSH / KERA NEWS

There's a lot of confusing information out there, says Laura Trevisani with the Texas Campaign for the Environment.

"And we don't want the industry to confuse voters who want to ban fracking," she says, "to accidentally go the wrong way. So we're just trying to keep people informed on what the ballot is actually saying."

Voter John White says he understands the ballot clearly, and voted against the ban.

"I really feel as though its jobs and opportunities, and people should be able to get to those resources that's under the ground," he says.



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Denton residents vote on electronic and paper ballots in the 2014 election.

CREDIT CHRISTINA ULSH / KERA NEWS

After a nine-hour meeting in July, Denton City Council voted against the citizen-led proposal (<http://keranews.org/post/inside-last-nights-marathon-meeting-over-dentons-potential-fracking-ban>) to ban fracking, thus it was put on the ballot to be decided by residents.

NPR explored a study that links the process of hydraulic fracturing with earthquakes. (<http://www.npr.org/2014/07/13/331133817/why-a-texas-city-may-ban-fracking>)



(https://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/kera/files/styles/x_large/public/201411/denton_edit_0.jpg)

Signs around the city encourage voters to decide the fate of Denton fracking.

CREDIT DOUALY XAYKAOTHAO / KERA NEWS

Committees for and against the ban collectively raised over \$280,000, making it the most expensive campaign in Denton history (<http://www.dentonrc.com/local-news/local-news-headlines/20141007-fracking-debate-draws-cash.ece>).

If the ban on fracking passes, Denton could set a precedent for other cities — not just in Texas, but around the country (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/09/business/intexas-a-fight-over-fracking.html?>

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