

North Texas town voting on fracking ban - Associated Press State Wire: Texas (TX) - October 31, 2014

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DENTON, Texas (AP) — Anti-fracking activists and campaigners backed by big oil and gas companies sparred outside of voting sites on the last day of early voting in a North Texas university town that's considering a ban on new permits for hydraulic fracturing.

The referendum is on Tuesday's ballot in Denton, which is about 40 miles north of Dallas. Though preexisting permits would remain valid, opponents have called it a wholesale ban on drilling.

"There are good drillers and bad drillers, and people with drilling near their houses should look into which kind they have before trying to ban it," said Larry Schumacher, a paid campaigner for Denton Taxpayers for a Strong Economy, the political action committee created to defeat the measure.

Industry groups have warned the ban could be followed by litigation and a severe hit to Denton's economy.

Scores of cities in other states have considered similar bans over health and environmental concerns. But the proposal in Denton is a litmus test on whether any community in Texas — the nation's biggest oil and gas producer — can rebuff the industry and still thrive.

The ranking began when local activists submitted a petition to Denton's City Council in June with enough signatures to force a vote on the ban. Because the council rejected it, the measure went to a public vote and is on Tuesday's ballot.

"This is it. The city will uphold the ban as law" if it's approved by voters, city spokeswoman Lindsey Baker.

Supporters of the measure have raised only a fraction as much as opponents, according to the city secretary's latest political campaign reports.

Exxon Mobil subsidiary XTO Energy, based in Fort Worth, and Houston-based Enervest Operating have each donated \$45,000 to Denton Taxpayers for a Strong Economy.

Ed Soph, treasurer of the Pass the Ban PAC, said most of his group's contributions are individual donations of \$50 or less.

"It's David versus Goliath," he says.

Fracking involves blasting a mix of water, sand and chemicals deep into underground rock formations to release trapped oil and gas. Opponents in Denton say it pollutes air and drinking water, and the disposal of the vast amounts of water produced by the drilling process could cause

earthquakes.

Industry groups counter that it's cleaner than other forms of energy extraction and can be done safely.

Denton resident Randy Sorrells, who hopes to use earnings from the five pump jacks on his property to fund his children's college education, believes a ban would violate his property rights.

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