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# A Proposed Fracking Ban Sends Denton Voters To The Polls

By [DOUALY XAYKAOTHAO \(/PEOPLE/DOUALY-XAYKAOTHAO\)](#) • OCT 29, 2014

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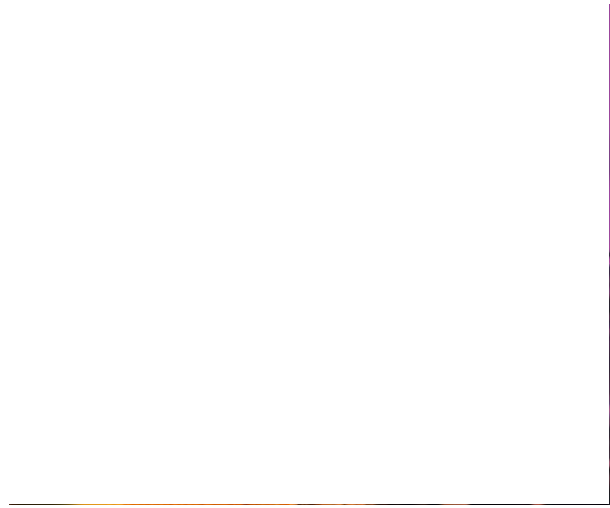
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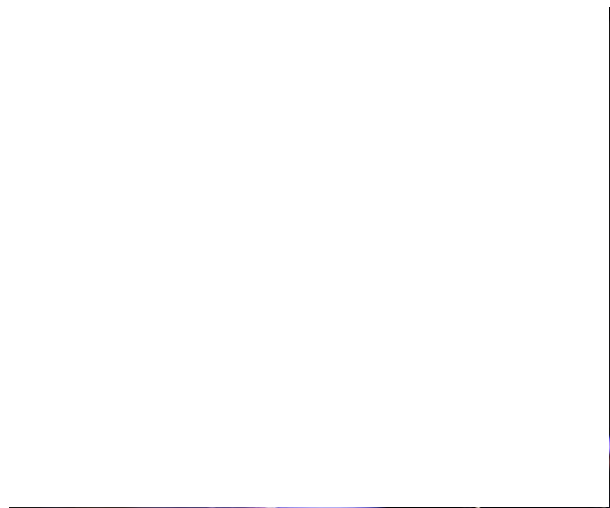
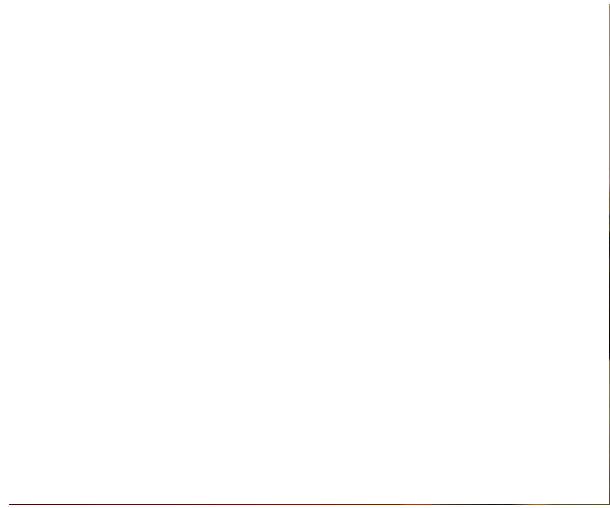
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*This first-time voter, Katheryn Chapman, made signs to show where she stands on the fracking ban in Denton.*

DOUALY XAYKAOTHAO / KERA NEWS



There's been an uptick in early voting in Denton, as much as 6,000 compared to the last mid-term election, and many say it's because of a proposal to ban fracking within city limits. The city that sits on top of 500 square miles of valuable gas reserves could become the first Texas town to prohibit hydraulic fracturing.



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5:00

In this college town, it's hard to miss the black and yellow billboards, with the letters "N-O" in red and the message: "Support Responsible Drilling." There are smaller signs, too, including one that's hand-made, in blue, black, red and green markers, and reads: "Don't Fall For Big Oil."

Katheryn Chapman spent several hours making that one, which sits in her front yard. She's 21, a first-time voter, and passionate.

"I'm a nanny," she said. "And I want them to grow up and have children that they feel safe bringing into the world, and that they feel safe that their grand-children are gonna rest under the trees that we're planting. I have a tattoo of a tree. I love nature. And I love our kids. And I love our people. And I want us to be safe."

She made another sign with the words: "Tricky, Deceptive, Clever, Ads."

"I do think that the advertising being sent out by Denton Taxpayers for A Strong Economy (<http://www.dentontaxpayers.com/>) is tricky," Chapman said. "It is clever, and it is deceitful. And so that's why I put that on my sign."

She's referring to a political mailer that compared two apples, one fresh, the other rotting. The pretty red apple was stamped with the word "responsible," while the dark, decaying apple was stamped with the word "irresponsible." Under the apples, a banner said the proposed drilling ban will financially hurt public schools and the two local universities, University of North Texas and Texas Woman's University.

Richard D. Hayes is a board member of Denton Taxpayers For A Strong Economy, the group that paid for the mailers.

"I think if people will listen to the arguments, and then discover the facts," Hayes said. "The facts will give them great comfort that the hysteria, or the arguments that are being put forth by the proponents of the ban fall on their face."

To date, his group has received nearly \$700,000 in political donations, while a different group called Pass the Ban (<http://frackfreedenton.com/>), has received nearly \$75,000.

"You can have clean air, clean water, good health," Hayes said. "And you can have natural gas developments in your communities."

He cites a study ([http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/16/science/study-points-to-well-leaks-not-fracking-for-water-contamination.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/16/science/study-points-to-well-leaks-not-fracking-for-water-contamination.html?_r=0)) released in August by the non-profit National Academy of Sciences that blamed water contamination on leaky well shafts, not the method of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing. Hayes, who's a real estate attorney, says if the ban passes, lawsuits will be likely under the Texas constitution.

"If in fact you can ban an industry from undertaking their business, if you can ban the activity, it's going to subject the city to multitude of lawsuits, and millions of dollars, if not hundreds of millions of dollars of liability," he said.

Industry defenders say a ban could cost Denton as much as three-quarters-of-a-billion dollars. Ban supporters argue those numbers are inflated, and that the city only gets a little over \$500,000 in property tax revenue from minerals such as oil and gas.

Taylor and Jacqueline Stem are in the middle of this fight. They own land in Denton and are mineral rights owners, meaning they own what's underneath, and can sell that to oil and gas companies. The Stems attended a marathon nine-hour meeting in July where the Denton City Council voted down the ban. That night, among the cicadas, both explained why they oppose the ban.

"The solution, it seems to me, like is let the state decide whether fracking is good or bad," he said. "And let the city write ordinances that protect the individual citizens when the drilling occurs."

Jacqueline said: "The less we produce, and there's much of it that we can produce, that we have right under our feet. What we don't produce, we have to buy from the Middle East. And we get dependent on them."

Denton has nearly 300 gas wells. The measure would ban only new wells. And whether the ban fails or passes, the Denton City Council still has to decide how to regulate the existing wells.

"In some sense I would argue that this is a great statement of what Texas is," said Denton City Council member Kevin Roden (<http://rodenfordenton.com/blog/>). "Texas doesn't like some entity coming in, telling it what to do. In this case it's anti-big corporation that's going to come into our city and tell us how we're going to do things. So I think the spirit of democracy is alive and well. And we're ground zero for what I think is a new generational fight."

Roden resigned from the Denton Chamber of Commerce to protest a resolution opposing the ban.

"When you see that much money, which is unprecedented in a city election, that signals to me that the industry knows its in for an uphill battle, and they're putting out all the stops," Roden said.

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