

Hydrogen Hub Act tabled

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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Clean energy and how to create it continues to be a topic of discussion among government entities. The state's representatives began discussing another option during the second session of the 55th New Mexico Legislature.

On Jan. 25, Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham announced the introduction of House Bill 4, the Hydrogen Hub Development Act, which will expand the clean energy economy in New Mexico while lowering greenhouse gas emissions through incentivizing low-carbon hydrogen production and export.

According to a press release from the governor's office, President Biden's administration plans to invest \$8 billion to encourage the development of four regional hydrogen hubs to produce and use low-carbon hydrogen in manufacturing, heating, and transportation.

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“By incentivizing clean hydrogen development through this legislation, we are steering this emerging industry toward a lower-carbon future,” Lujan Grisham said. “This is New Mexico’s chance to reap the vast economic and environmental benefits of clean hydrogen, and I urge legislators to think boldly and support the Hydrogen Hub Development Act.”

On the same day that the governor’s press release was put out, the Hydrogen Hub Development Act was tabled by a 6-4 vote during its first committee hearing.

In an interview with the *Sun*, McKinley County Attorney Doug Decker explained that the Act would put together a board to oversee how the hub was used and if it was being used correctly. The board would also create the standards for how the operation of these hydrogen productions and the hydrogen generation of electricity would run. However, the Act only proposes creating a board; it does not include anything about what will happen when and if these hydrogen hubs are created.

“As far as the bill itself, the only thing in the bill was the development of a board of directors for overseeing the hydrogen hub and tax incentives for if someone did bring in a hydrogen hub,” Commissioner Billy Moore, Dist. 1, stated. “It didn’t define what clean hydrogen was.”

After they tabled the discussion during the Jan. 11 meeting, because they wanted more information, the commissioners voted to support the Act on Feb. 1. Moore and Commissioner Robert Baca, Dist. 3, both supported the Act, while Commissioner Genevieve Jackson, Dist. 2, voted against it.

Jackson was unavailable for comment, but Decker said she probably voted against the Act because she is against fracking. Decker explained that part of the process with the hydrogen hubs would include sequestering the hydrogen, which is usually done underground. He compared this to fracking, saying the two processes were very similar.

Those who support the hub point out that it would create jobs in New Mexico and that tax incentives would be a part of the deal.

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Decker said the hydrogen hub would take over the old power plant.

“All of the equipment is still there and can be used, they would have to do some work on it to convert it from burning coal to burning hydrogen, and then they would have to put in the infrastructure to create the hydrogen from whatever other source they would use,” Decker explained.

After the first hearing, Decker said he doesn’t expect the Act to go very far in this legislative session. He said it may be tweaked a little bit in the next session come January.

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