

Oil Industry is gaslighting us on fracking

Written by By Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez Senate District 16, Bernalillo
Friday, 01 March 2019 10:33



A recent opinion piece in the Albuquerque Journal by an oil industry executive perfectly exemplifies something that is very important for all people to understand: gaslighting. As the former executive director of a domestic violence agency, I am familiar with gaslighting tactics.

Gaslighting is a term that describes how an individual in a position of power may abuse that power to systematically lie in order to manipulate people. It can happen to partners, friends, and even a whole society. The tactics that gaslighters use are to lie, to exaggerate, to threaten, and repeat. They try to wear their victims down and make them think they are crazy and that the fabricated falsehoods are the true reality. Through this process, they attempt to dominate and control.

The author of that opinion piece and his advisors display perfect examples of attempted gaslighting against me, my colleagues in the legislature, the Journal's readers, and all of New Mexico's people.

The first major false and hyperbolic claim is that Senate Bill 459, co-sponsored by me and a number of my senate and house colleagues, is a "ban" on fracking. That is plainly false. Our bill is a four-year moratorium on issuing new permits for fracking until we have the chance to evaluate it and to institute regulations that are currently lacking. All existing permits for drilling, traditional or multi-level hydraulic fracking, will continue.

And, the bill requires that the relevant state agencies prepare reports on the actual and potential impacts of multi-level hydraulic fracking on New Mexico's land, water, air, and our public health. It requires agencies to suggest needed regulations to protect our health, our environment, and our water as is our constitutional duty. The main problem that this bill solves is a major one: The

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State of New Mexico currently lacks sufficient capacity to regulate or monitor the impacts of hydraulic fracking.

The author of that piece also makes reference to a report by the EPA in 2015 and claims that the report says that “groundwater is not inherently in danger from the fracking process. Just ask Obama.” In reality, the report describes that “water might be particularly at risk (in areas where) water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing (occur) in times or areas of low water availability, particularly in areas with limited or declining groundwater resources.” (www.epa.gov/hfstudy/executive-summary-hydraulic-fracturing-study-draft-assessment-2015)

) This description and warning from the EPA is particularly salient to the water resource scarcity we have in New Mexico.

The piece further distorts reality when it discusses water use in fracking as compared to golf course maintenance. The author claims that “one fracking stage uses 250,000 gallons of water” and then compares that to the amount of water used to maintain a San Juan golf course in the summer.

What he neglects to admit is the multiple stages of the multi-stage fracking process. In the end, producing a million barrels of oil requires about five times that amount of water, both for use in the wells and to dispose safely. (<https://www.oilandgas360.com/water-handling-in-oilfield-operations/>)

Plus, golf course watering typically does not poison the water it uses, and its water does not disappear from the water cycle. Fracked water is loaded with unknown chemicals and discharged so deep in the ground that it is completely removed from the water cycle.

The gaslighting piece makes many other subtle attempts to demean me, my intelligence, and falsely misidentifies my position in the legislature. It refers to this bill as “my” bill, even though Senator Benny Shendo is a co-sponsor and there are other legislators who have signed on. I am described as a representative while I am a senator.

The letter attacks me by saying the author would have thought that someone as educated as I am would understand the studies and state economics, implying that there is something wrong with my intellectual capacity. Again, this is classic gaslighting: single out, make the victim feel

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isolated, and demean.

Finally, the author claims that the oil industry might leave and all the money from taxes and royalties will disappear. This shows a decided lack of commitment to the state, a threat, and a falsehood. The oil will still be in the ground serving as a reserve for the state; there are about 64,000 wells that the state regulates, not counting around 50,000 federal wells. Some of the existing wells have pumped since the 1930s. Drillers will pump as long as it is economically beneficial.

They close down and open up wells based on economic profitability. Indeed, they are pumping now even though prices for crude oil are low, presumably making profits on volume. The oil and gas industry does not take into account state needs when they make drilling and pumping decisions. And, they ignore values such as the imperative to protect historic cultural sites such as Chaco Canyon. The state has a responsibility to step in.

To all of the oil industry employees and lobbyists who are prone to this practice, please stop trying to gaslight us. I call on all New Mexicans to learn about the responsibility of the state legislature to protect our air, our land, our health, and our water.

You can start by reading the New Mexico Constitution, Article 20 Section 21, which requires the legislature to protect our beautiful and healthy environment. Then, raise your voice to your legislators so that they know you are concerned about the potential impact of fracking, and that you agree a pause is in order.

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