

Temporary ban on NM fracking proposed

BY DAN MCKAY / JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Tuesday, January 14th, 2020 at 10:04pm

SANTA FE – A Democratic state senator wants New Mexico – one of the nation’s top oil-producing states – to take a four-year break from issuing new permits for hydraulic fracturing.

Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez of Albuquerque pre-filed a proposal for the legislative session that calls for several state agencies to study the impacts of fracking and recommend new regulations.

The ban on new permits would expire in mid-2024.

It isn’t clear whether the proposal will be considered in the coming session, which is largely dedicated to budget proposals and other agenda items approved by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham.

But Sedillo Lopez said she hopes the legislation, Senate Bill 104, will generate public discussion, even if it isn’t passed this year. State residents, she said, deserve a thorough analysis of how hydraulic fracturing affects the environment and public health.

“I think it’s really important for the state to take a breather and to look it,” Sedillo Lopez said Tuesday.

Opponents of the bill – which was also introduced last year – say it would strangle the state’s economic growth. An oil boom in southeastern New Mexico has allowed the state to ramp up spending on education and other services.

“Supporters of this bill better be willing to walk into every classroom in New Mexico and explain to families why they want to jeopardize one-third of the budget to appease radical environmentalists,” said Larry Behrens of Power the Future, an advocacy group for the state energy industry. “A ban on fracking would cost billions to our state and threaten more than 100,000 jobs, yet supporters will still drive to Santa Fe in their gas-powered cars and not think of their hypocrisy for even one moment.”

Sedillo Lopez said that her proposal would temporarily halt the issuance of new permits, not halt energy development already underway, and that opponents are overstating the financial impact.

New Mexico is now the No. 3 producer of oil in the United States, with help from hydraulic fracturing and other techniques that have unlocked oil and gas buried in the Permian Basin.

Fracking involves the injection of water, sand and chemicals into the ground to extract oil and gas.