

Meeting summary for 2025 Legislative Preview ZoomFest, Reboot Our Democracy, Session 4 (01/16/2025)

Recording Link and Password

<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/U0kdGXTxEYuEF7q89Wb2Gowq9IxHb9BdwQyIUeuKS-5LDzVAGgypSg79Js5ShGd2.YNTZz7JBm7Bh1dmr>

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Quick recap

The Zoom Fest session focused on the negative impacts of fracking on the environment and human health, with discussions on problematic water bills and alternative bills. Concerns were raised about the proposed 75 million dollar project and the challenges and costs associated with treating Permian Basin produced water. The group also discussed efforts to oppose the governor's proposed "Strategic Water Supply" plan, the limitations of thermal treatment in producing clean water from toxic waste, and the importance of having a unified message to legislators.

Next steps

- Attendees to oppose the strategic water supply proposal through op-eds, letters to the editor, public comments, and contacting legislators.
- Attendees to support the Water Protection Amendments bill sponsored by Senator Harold Pope.
- Attendees to support the complete ban of PFAS in oil and gas downhole operations bill sponsored by Senator Steinborn.
- Attendees to support the Public Expression Protection Act sponsored by Andrea Romero, Senator Linda Lopez, and Senator Harold Pope.

- Attendees to email alerts@rebootourdemocracy.org to sign up as bill watchers and analysts.
 - Reboot Our Democracy to mobilize people across the state to notify and talk to legislators about key issues.
 - Attendees to frame arguments contrasting funding for the strategic water supply proposal with funding for vetted recommendations to deal with water scarcity.
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Summary

Zoom Fest: Trump-Proofing and Water Bills

Indivisible welcomed everyone to the Zoom Fest, their 4th session, and encouraged participants to mute themselves and label their questions in the chat. Upcoming sessions included discussions on Trump-proofing New Mexico's LGBTQ community, legislative updates, and criminal justice reform. Marielle Nassi and Norm Gom then took over to discuss a problematic water bill and alternative bills they support. They also mentioned that Ray Ellen Smith would be making them invisible to allow for their discussion.

Fracking's Environmental and Health Impacts

Mariel discussed the negative impacts of fracking on the environment and human health. She highlighted that fracking uses a large quantity of water and generates a significant amount of toxic waste, which is often disposed of in evaporation ponds or injection wells. These methods can lead to contamination of groundwater and surface water, as well as the creation of hazardous waste sites. Mariel also mentioned that there were 658 spills in 2022 and that the oil and gas industry is rife with Orwellian terms. She emphasized the need for responsible waste management and the exploration of alternatives to wastewater injection. The conversation ended with a discussion about a recent blowout incident in Texas, which contaminated the ground, surface water, and possibly groundwater.

Uncertainty Surrounds Proposed 75 Million Dollar Project

Mariel handed over the discussion to Norm, who shared his expertise as an engineer and expert witness in the produced water rules hearing. He expressed concerns about the proposed 75 million dollar project, likening it to a 'pig in a poke' due to the uncertainty of what it entails. Norm highlighted that the project could involve either oil-produced water or deep, brackish groundwater, which are vastly different and should not be conflated. He emphasized the need for clarity on what the project entails, as the current situation is akin to buying a pig without knowing what it is.

Challenges in Treating Permian Basin Water

Norm discussed the challenges and costs associated with treating Permian Basin produced water, which is 10 to 20% salt by weight. He highlighted that conventional treatment methods are not effective for this water, requiring distillation and energy-intensive processes. Norm also pointed out that the energy requirements for treating Permian Basin produced water are immense, potentially requiring multiple San Juan generating stations. In contrast, brackish groundwater treatment processes are well understood and less energy-intensive. Norm criticized a feasibility study commissioned by the New Mexico Environment Department for its bias and lack of addressing the unsustainability of both produced water and brackish water. He concluded that both types of water have significant disposal problems, with Permian Basin produced water posing a more severe issue.

Oil and Gas Industry's Water Risks

Norm discussed the risks and costs associated with the oil and gas industry's disposal of waste, emphasizing the need for a well-vetted water supply solution. He criticized the consortium's inability to generate the necessary data for rulemaking and the lack of funding for long-term water management. Norm also highlighted the potential consequences of the industry's reliance on a transient solution. Mariel then outlined the group's opposition to the strategic water supply and their support for the Water Protection Amendments bill, which aims to regulate the use of produced water and fund the plugging of abandoned wells. She also mentioned the need for a complete ban on PFAS in oil and gas operations and the Public Expression Protection Act.

Opposing Governor's Strategic Water Supply Plan

This segment discusses efforts to oppose the governor's proposed "Strategic Water Supply" plan that would use treated produced water from oil and gas operations for various purposes. Mariel explains the goals of the "Public Expression Protection Act" to safeguard free speech from lawsuits aimed at suppressing it. She urges supporting legislation to increase water protections, ban PFAS, require chemical disclosure, and impose a fee on oil and gas for remediation. Kathleen shares Secretary Kenney's claim that treated produced water would only be used in closed-loop processes initially, which Norm dismisses as lacking transparency and objectivity. The discussion highlights concerns over the influence of oil and gas money on policymakers.

Thermal Treatment and Produced Water

Norm discussed the limitations of thermal treatment in producing clean water from toxic waste, highlighting the need for a membrane in the distillation process. He also mentioned the failure of treatment plants built by sophisticated international engineering companies. Mariel added that testimony at the produce water hearing was unequivocal, with Nmed stating there is no such thing as closed loop, meaning no residual waste. However, she pointed out that the residual waste is highly concentrated and toxic. Don expressed concern about further subsidizing the oil and gas industry, which he believes is already heavily subsidized. He also criticized the industry's waste of natural gas through flaring and leaking. Norm concluded by stating that the idea of using produced water as a water supply is far-fetched and the governor's idea was impulsive.

Consistent Messaging and Bill Watching

In the meeting, Linda and Mariel discussed the importance of having a group of people consistently present to legislators to convey a unified message. They emphasized the effectiveness of this approach in previous instances. Indivisible suggested that people interested in being bill watchers or analysts should email alerts@rebootourdemocracy.org to be added to the queue. Pat shared her conversation with Representative Susan Herrera, who had previously opposed the bill in question. The group also discussed the potential use of produced water for compact compliance, with Norm expressing concerns about the lack of scientific evidence supporting its safety.