

The New Mexico energy plan doesn't go nearly far enough

By Suzie Schwartz

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I have been following the Legislative session and attended the Taos Democratic Party's Renewable Energy Powerhouse Session recently. From what I can tell, "business as usual" is the New Mexico plan: increase fracking, when we already have

67,000 oil and gas wells in New Mexico, in order to fund education and utility-scale wind and solar for export, while minimally addressing decentralization, consumption and the common good. New Mexico Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard is pushing for House Bill 398, which would increase oil and gas royalties for New Mexico by up to 5 percent. The New Mexico Oil and Gas Association, which is essentially a powerful corporate oil and gas lobbying arm, vigorously opposes the increase and also opposes Senate Bill

459 which would put a four-year pause on new fracking permits while environmental impact studies are conducted.

At more than one million gallons of our precious water resources per frack, New Mexico is being held hostage by the fossil fuel industry. I believe people are smart enough to come up with other ways to fund our children's education. One possibility, which would obviously be wildly unpopular with those who hold the reins of power in our state, would be at least partially to reverse the 2003 Richardson tax cuts, which lowered the top marginal personal income tax rate, reduced the capital gains tax and cost the state an average of \$72 million per year over the first five years. Another example, industrial hemp production, wouldn't depend on many millions of gallons of water. Anything made from petroleum-based plastics can be made with hemp.

I fail to comprehend how turning New Mexico into a Wall Street-controlled, utility-scaled energy mine will benefit or improve the lives of the vulnerable and poor in New Mexico. It seems insane to me that New Mexico believes it has to bow to Big Oil and Gas in order to make one dollar in royalties to their three in profits, by producing and exporting fracked fossil fuel products in order to develop utility-scale wind and solar to be exported to neighboring states that have plenty of their own sun, wind and money.

The New Mexico Renewable Energy Plan, while an improvement over the past eight years, will actually contribute almost nothing to the mitigation of catastrophic climate change, which is the greatest existential threat to all life on earth in the history of humanity, except, of course, for the rapidly growing threat of nuclear obliteration.

The simple fact is that America needs to reduce consumption from the top down.

Many of us today can still remember the days of pre-globalization and pre-petroleum-based single-use plastics when America had local industries of all types.

I believe all of our elected New Mexico leaders need seriously to consider the idea of returning to and revitalizing the nearly dead paradigm of working and producing energy on a human and local scale in order to reduce our overall consumption of energy beginning immediately.

A comprehensive plan would include, in part, a return to manufacturing goods with our own hands in our own regions; subsidizing and expanding local agriculture; water conservation; aggressively developing much more effective public transportation systems, especially in our cities; reintroducing the key components, reduce and reuse, to the recycling picture; and subsidizing small locally scaled renewable energy – making it possible for all homes to have grid-tied PV [photovoltaic] solar systems and thermal solar collectors in addition to the simple components of energy efficiency.

If there is to be a future for the earth, then the most powerful and rich humans, again, from the top down, must understand, teach, model and fund the concepts of peace and sustainability in all things instead of continuing to promote the cruel and fatally flawed dominant paradigm of endless resources, endless growth and endless war.

These excerpts from author James Howard Kunstler provide a thought-provoking picture [from his “Dreams Die Hard” blog, Feb. 8, 2019]:

“America has been blowing green smoke ... for years, promoting oxymorons such as ‘green skyscrapers’ and ‘clean energy,’ but the truth is we’re not going to run WalMart, Suburbia, DisneyWorld, and the interstate highway system on any combination of wind, solar, geothermal, recycled Fry-Max, and dark matter. We’re just running too much stuff at too great a scale for too many people. We’ve blown through the capital already and replaced it with IOUs that will never be honored, and we’re caught in an entropy trap of diminishing returns from all the work-arounds we’re desperately trying A better index for our journey into the unknown frontier beyond modernity will not be what is ‘green’ and ‘smart’ but perhaps what is ‘sane’ and ‘insane.’”

Suzie Schwartz is an El Prado resident. This letter also appeared in The Los Alamos Reporter, Feb. 21, 2019.