



*The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 99-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.*

April 22, 2019

To: Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair

Re: **HB 2623** – Prohibits use of hydraulic fracturing for oil and gas exploration and production – **SUPPORT**

**Our testimony in support of HB 2623 is consistent with the national League’s position, “Preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem, with maximum protection of public health and the environment” with a focus on demanding pollution prevention, as well as positions on justice and public safety for all people.** Since the 1950’s, the League of Women Voters has been at the forefront of national efforts to protect air, land and water resources. At the 2018 National LWV Convention, the following “Climate Test” resolution passed almost unanimously: “The League of Women Voters supports a set of climate assessment criteria that ensures that energy policies align with current climate science. These criteria require that the latest climate science be used to evaluate proposed energy policies and major projects in light of the globally-agreed-upon goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees C, informed by the successful spirit of global cooperation as affirmed in the UN COP 21 Paris agreement.”

It is consideration of the facts detailed below that leads the League to ask for your support for HB 2623. There are known issues with climate change: water pollution and usage, seismic activity associated with fracking, health risks, landowner concerns, and socio-economic impacts on communities, most or all of which raise potential legislative and regulatory needs.

- **Climate impacts:** Hydraulic fracturing in Oregon would be used to develop natural gas. The [U.S. Energy Information Administration \(EIA\)](#) states that, “Natural gas is mainly methane—a strong greenhouse gas. Some natural gas leaks into the atmosphere from oil and natural gas wells, storage tanks, pipelines, and processing plants. These leaks were the source of about 32% of total U.S. methane emissions and about 4% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in 2015.” Emissions also result from flaring (burn-off) at the well site, upon initial development and a producing well may be flared subsequently until it can be connected to the closest pipeline infrastructure. Again, from the EIA: “flaring is safer than releasing natural gas into the air and results in lower overall greenhouse gas emissions because CO2 is not as strong a greenhouse gas as methane.”
- **Water pollution:** Fracking poses a risk to groundwater supplies. The [EPA’s 2016 study](#) “found scientific evidence that hydraulic fracturing activities can impact drinking water resources under some circumstances . . . [and] identifies certain conditions under which impacts from hydraulic fracturing activities can be more frequent or severe.” The League hopes that the EPA continues to engage in credible research efforts that will shed even further light on this reality.
- **Water use:** Fracking relies on massive use of water. The EIA states that, “The fracturing of wells requires large amounts of water. In some areas of the country, significant use of water for fracking may affect aquatic habitats and the availability of water for other uses.” A [Scientific](#)

[American](#) article indicates that, “Oil and natural gas fracking, on average, uses more than 28 times the water it did 15 years ago, gulping up to 9.6 million gallons of water per well and putting farming and drinking sources at risk in arid states, especially during drought.” It’s important to realize that “produced water” from fracking is contaminated with chemical additives, some unknown per a 2005 exemption from reporting requirements amended into the Drinking Water Act, and most often is disposed of in injection wells. Fresh, untreated water applied to any surface area such as a golf course stays in the natural water cycle. Injected water does not. Climate change is already expected to result in water shortages in some parts of the state and we cannot afford to take water “off the table”—rendering it unusable for drinking and agricultural needs.

- **Seismic effects:** A complete understanding of the reason for [earthquake](#) activity in Ohio and Oklahoma has not been reached, but at least the reinjection process has been determined to be responsible. The EIA states that, “In addition to natural gas, fracking fluids and formation waters are returned to the surface. These wastewaters are frequently disposed of by injection into deep wells. The injection of wastewater into the subsurface can cause earthquakes that are large enough to be felt and may cause damage.” Unlike Ohio and Oklahoma, the seismic potential in Oregon is already extreme. Natural or Injection-caused seismic activity increases the risk of damage to, and leakages from, gas wells and resultant contamination and pollution.
- **Health Risks:** In discussions of hydraulic fracturing involving health, the question is not “if,” rather “how serious.” A [study](#) released in 2018 by Physicians for Social Responsibility and Concerned Health Professionals of N.Y. is just one of thousands of studies that have highlighted public health impacts from skin, neurological, and gastrointestinal issues to low birth weight and preterm births, respiratory distress, and increased cancer rates. New York and Maryland have banned fracking for these and other reasons, as have [Ireland, Bulgaria, France, Germany, and parts of Australia](#). The Netherlands currently has a moratorium in place.
- **Impacts on landowners:** Oregonians across the political spectrum have already demonstrated strong resistance to the use of eminent domain for pipeline construction. Natural gas development means more of that, but if the gas is sourced in Oregon, surface owners on drilling sites face a different, but also profound situation. Experiences in other states show that surface owners who do not own their mineral rights (a property phenomenon known as “[split estate](#)”) are more frequently than not seriously disadvantaged by oil and gas developers offering one time payments for the long-term occupation of acres of their land, loss of privacy, exposure to toxic emissions, and so on. Those who own their mineral rights may welcome the possibilities of royalties, but they may also find themselves shortchanged in the sophisticated negotiation process with large company “landmen” or may struggle with “forced pooling” as in [Idaho](#) just east of Ontario, OR. Passing [surface owner protection laws](#) is just one of the legislative and regulatory issues Oregon would face if fracking were to be utilized.
- **Socio-economic impacts on communities:** Fracking can drive “[boom and bust](#)” cycles in local communities, contributing to social disruption, increased crime, excessive pressure on services, affordable housing shortages, and other unintended consequences.

Oregon must have its eyes open and be fully informed about the negative emissions impacts of any new fossil fuel development in light of our climate change goals, including that which would be facilitated by fracking. We must also move as quickly and aggressively as we can to sustainable energy development. The development of new fossil fuel resources would come at the expense of that thrust and, wherever

they become operational, our emissions reduction goals are thwarted and success put farther out of reach.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation and we urge you to support HB 2623.

Handwritten signatures of Norman Turrill, Shirley Weathers, and Claudia Keith.

Norman Turrill  
LWVOR President

Shirley Weathers and Claudia Keith  
LWVOR Climate Change Portfolio

Cc: Kristen Sheeran, Director Governors Carbon Policy  
Rep. Julie Fahey, [Rep.JulieFahey@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Rep.JulieFahey@oregonlegislature.gov)  
Sen. James Manning, [Sen.JamesManning@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Sen.JamesManning@oregonlegislature.gov)  
Sen. Michael Dembrow, [Sen.MichaelDembrow@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Sen.MichaelDembrow@oregonlegislature.gov)  
Ian Madin, Senior Scientist, Earthquake Hazard Geologist, [ian.madin@Oregon.gov](mailto:ian.madin@Oregon.gov)