

Oral History Collection

Dr. Deborah Needleman Armintor

Interviewer: ?

Date: Fall 2015

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Dr. Armintor: These were people who were protecting their health and their own local environment. It was clear, right from the beginning of the multi-million dollar, pro-fracking campaign, that these were people with a lot of money but who weren't, they weren't here. And so they didn't have as much at stake. You could see that. Their bodies weren't in the street. There were all these bodies and minds and hearts who were here in Denton, you could see them out and about, and talk to them. And so I just had this feeling it was going to pass, but then everything kind of went downhill from there. They scared everybody into repealing.

Interviewer: Dr. Deborah Needleman Armintor has been living

in Denton, Texas since 2002, when she was hired as an English professor at the University of North Texas. Around 2008 she became aware of the issue of fracking in Denton, but was only able to show support for the ban by keeping informed, donating, and signing petitions.

Arminton: Trying to remember the year that I got tenure. I don't even remember [laughs]. But while I was on the tenure track, I was just about taking care of my own work and when the kids were young, I was about the kids, until HB40. And that was when I became, I just dove right into it. I didn't want to be a bystander anymore.

Interviewer: Shortly after HB40 had passed, Kevin Roden, a Councilman who had avidly supported the ban, posted on his blog that he thought repeal would be a good idea.

Arminton: This was the first that anybody had heard that city council was considering repealing the ban as a result of HB40 and also the two lawsuits against the city. This was the first that ordinary citizens, even ordinary citizens who were very involved, this was the first that we had heard of it. I was outraged. And so I went

to a rally, and I brought the whole family. We went, we went to this rally, it was right after, maybe the day after HB40 was passed. And I felt like I was in a daze. And I was going up to people, friends of mine who were involved, and saying "Okay, can you explain to me, what's this business about repeal? Why did Kevin Roden say on his blog that city council is considering repealing, and why does he seem to think it's a good idea?" The three people I talked to said, "I really don't...I don't know. But Kevin Roden is behind it, and he's good, so there's got to be a good reason." But I just thought 'We're going to fight this.' I realize now that that was naïve. Looking back I can see that, in my opinion, that the city management, the unelected, appointed staff, were never interested in supporting the ban, and that they had no intention from the beginning of doing anything to defend it.

Interviewer: It was clear that Dr. Armintor was not satisfied with these answers. She finally found an answer from Keely Briggs, her newly elected district representative, who had run

on a pro-ban campaign.

Armintor: Keely was wonderful. I knew her. Her kids went to the same school that my kids go to. And I saw her, and I was so happy because I thought 'Okay, she's going to explain to me why repeal is a good idea.' So I said, "Keely, can you explain to me, what is this?" This is while the rally--we are all standing there with signs. I forget what was happening, a-and I think people were talking and some people were singing. We were all kind of standing around. It was nice to have this critical mass here. It almost felt like a funeral. We were all together, dealing with processing the same kind of emotions. So I said, "Keely, okay, can you explain this to me? Why does Kevin Roden seem to be advocating repeal? I don't get it. I read his reasons, and they didn't make sense to me." And she said, "Well, do you think repealing the ban is a good idea?" And I said, "Well, NO! But there must be something I'm missing, right?" And she said, "Do you think repealing the ban is a good idea?" "NO." And then she said, it was-- something about look in your heart, what does

your heart tell you? And I said, "My heart tells me it's, pardon my French, my heart tells me it's a really shitty idea." [Both laugh]. And she smiled, and she said then, "Go with that." That's when I knew, 'Oh, she is... she's good, she's the real deal.' I felt, and I still feel now, that there was no good reason for repeal. Then from that point on, I was in, I have not stopped.

Interviewer: After the rally, Dr. Arminter has done a number of things in retaliation to HB40, and the repeal of the ban. After speaking with lawyers and looking into the Texas Open Meetings Act, Dr. Arminter has decided she will take legal action against the City Council's decision to repeal the ban. She has also started a North Texas group with Mark McCord, the head of Frack Dallas. Currently, Citizens for Local Control is networking with environmental groups around the nation, and working on strategies to have their demands met. Two of the things the group will fight for is the repeal of HB40 and better representation in and from their local government.

[End of interview]