Oral History Collection

Ms. Keely Briggs
Denton City Council Member
District 2

Interviewer: Ben Ambercrombie          Date: Fall, 2015

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Mr. Ambercrombie: Bear with me, because I want what you said
to be on the record. I think people need
to hear that. I think your perspective, in
particular, is valuable. So--

Ms. Briggs: You mean the July.

Mr. Ambercrombie: July 15th, 2014.

Ms. Briggs: Right. That’s sort of when my journey
began. If you would have told me then,
that I would be sitting here now, I
wouldn’t have believed you, really. My son
spoke at the city council meeting in favor
of the fracking ban. We went, we
volunteered, we were advocates of the ban.

When the city council gave it to the
citizens, and put it in their hands to vote. At the time, we wanted the city council just to go ahead and do it, but they didn’t. They gave it to the citizens to vote. And I’m glad they did, because for me now, sitting where I sit, it’s easy for me to know, the majority of the citizens, what they wanted. So the ban passed. There was a lot of celebration. David beat Goliath sort of thing. The industry put a whole lot of money into trying to get the ban not passed. But the citizens spoke, and the community came together and it was pretty inspiring. They basically said, “If you’re not going to do it, we will.” You know, it was democracy at its best [pause]. And then we had democracy at its worst. [Laughs].

Ambercrombie: I’d like to trace that timeline. I think that’s a good arc, democracy at its best and then the de-evolution, the tumble. How did the tumble start?

Briggs: It started in the legislature--Texas--Austin. It started with the industry pouring money into people there, to get the vote that they wanted, to get HB40 passed, which was
basically written by the industry to have—to do whatever they want in cities. It was painful, yes. We saw it from afar.

Ambercrombie: You watched this happen.

Briggs: We knew it was happening, and we knew what it was going to take away. We were still campaigning at that point. We weren't resting. We were calling, we were going to Austin, we were speaking, we were sending emails. I have three sons. I couldn't make a lot of trips, but I sat on my phone and called, and left messages. Please don't pass HB40, don't do this to local control, to our citizens. But it passed. With flying colors. And the majority voted for it, so then it was effective immediately.

Ambercrombie: When that happened, there was a particular phrase in the Star Telegram that struck me. The city council was warned that it should cooperate, I suppose. Phrases like that kind of conjure images of these great powers crashing in on the roof of death. How did it feel when it was happening? Was it more procedural? Did it felt like an assault? Did
it feel, simply very personal?

Briggs: At this point I wasn’t on the seat, I was still a Mom of three sons who really cared about our city and about what was going to happen to our city, and if this were to pass through. Honestly, I didn’t realize the impact HB40 would really have. I knew the potential, I knew how crappy it sounded. But at that time I kind of was still going with, “We’re just going to back our city here, we’re going to back our citizens.” And I even ran on that, knowing that HB40 was in the House, it was going to pass. When it did, it was like, “Oh, man, they got to them.” But it really still didn’t change my mind about the way I felt about our city, because what we campaigned for, and the issues that were caused from fracking were valid and were relevant and they were still true. So a law isn’t going to take that away. A law is not going to make people that are sick well.

Ambercrombie: How do we adapt to the difficult reality of things.

Briggs: We don’t adapt. We fight. We vote. We change
that. I mean, you can't just say, "Oh, well. I guess that's the way it is" and give up. Because running everything down, there's no hope. If that's the case my 6 year old, what does he have to live for? I mean, if we just forget about our environment and our air and our caring about people. I mean, what kind of world is that?

Abercrombie: That's important.

That's why I'm here, I mean, I'm just one person, but I'm going to yell, I'm going to scream as much as I can. So if you're going on a timeline, we have the ban, it passes, HB40, the ban is taken away, repealed. The ordinance passes, the ordinance is weak, it's not enough to protect our citizens. And then, after this, "Hey everybody, we know that you wanted a ban originally, we took that away from you. But hey guess what? You're going to get two natural gas wells. We're going to incentivize fracking and we're just going to give you energy from the thing that you don't want." It's like a punch in the gut. It's like, are you serious?
Ambercrombie: Who’s the “we?” Who’s the we--?

Briggs: The city, I guess. I don’t know who is running the city. It’s not me, your district representative. It’s not me. I’m just voting.

Ambercrombie: Are your opinions, which actually sound more like facts, are they the minority or the majority opinion on the council?

Briggs: I’m usually a minority. [Long pause.] And you know, I, again, I see things though a different set of eyes. I see things for different reasons. I don’t see things as--I don’t know, “What it’s going to do for me.”

Ambercrombie: How do you see it?

Briggs: I see it, “How is it going to affect everyone else” And maybe that’s why I’m sometimes of the minority. [Pause.] We have an extreme amount of talented citizens, in a very smart, educated--you know two universities, and I call on our citizens to have them speak to council on alternative plans, on the future of our city. Where do we want to go? Um, you know so...

[End of Interview]