

Oral History Collection

Professor Adam Briggie

Interviewer:

Date: Fall 2015

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer:

Professor Adam Briggie on his initial engagement with the fracking controversy in Denton.

Professor Briggie: I moved to Denton in 2009, and I had never heard of fracking before then. I learned about it quickly because there were the wells going in next to McKenna Park at the time. I went down to a protest at city hall, just to learn what the heck was going on, and got interested in it all that way. So that was kind of my professional engagement with the issue. And it's important to note that from the beginning it was not about banning fracking, it was about

what kinds of rules do we need to increase protections for safety.

Interviewer: Professor Adam Briggles on being contacted by the FBI in 2012.

Briggles: There was an FBI gentlemen and a number of the Dallas police force came and sat right where you are now, and asked a series of questions. Why they approached me I think was simply because I was playing this role as the lead of this advisory group. What they said they were looking for, was for me to keep my ear to the ground, if I heard of any threats of violence or environmental terrorism. So I told them that I didn't know anything. They kept saying that they respected peoples' right to protest but they wanted to make sure that we were playing nice in the sandbox, that they had in mind. So I don't know if they saw me as a trusted, potential source of information. Or if they saw me as a potential rabble rouser.

Interviewer: Threat.

Briggles: Right. It wasn't clear.

Interviewer: Professor Adam Briggles on the writing of the initial ban on fracking.

Briggle: --but most of their effort was--and so that would be like a court case based on what are the laws of place, and how does a judge interpret the ban within those laws. Most of the effort was bent on changing the laws, and then once they got the new law, HB40, referencing that new law, in the original lawsuit, right? So that leaves me to think that, you know I think it would have been, a very interesting, I think a very winnable court case, under those laws--that the ban would have withheld legal scrutiny. But we never got to have that happen because they changed the rules of the game, you know? Essentially, so we won't know [laughs] how it would have turned out. But I would not have-- that was something I spent a lot of personal and communal discernment about, is can you write a ban that isn't just a show of frustration and is obviously unconstitutional, but can you write one that could actually stick, that pragmatically will achieve the goals we want, which is to protect the health and safety of our neighborhoods. That was

always my interest and I think that we had it, right. But then--well the rest is history.

Interviewer: Professor Adam Briggles initial reaction to the pass of the ban.

Briggles: I was elated that the ban passed because--for two reasons. The most immediate was just because it was so exhausting. I invested so much of my personal time and identity into it, that it really had become a really personal, in that sense, victory. Right, kind of a vindication in many ways. Then quickly, there was also that feeling we're not going to see the kind of nightmare that we saw, leading up to the ban, where we attempt to regulate it, the industry, ignores that. They go ahead and frack right next to homes where kids are trying to play and sleep. That we've accomplished what any other, what most other cities have, which is just common sense land use policies: that you don't put an industry, especially a toxic, secretive industry, right next to people's homes. That felt really good. So, I mean, that was the initial feelings.

Interviewer: Professor Adam Briggles comments on his reasons

for protesting a fracking site and his ensuing arrest.

Briggle: The reason for doing it is just a sense that this is an unjust law, HB40. You know, and not just that, because I thought there were a lot of injustices in the existing regime from the moment I started looking at it. But I also thought there was leverage to change those things, working through the kind of slow, bureaucratic, sausage making, policy making machine. So that's what I did for 4 years, working on this. And then just to see, not only a ban on fracking bans, but a systematic sort of--um...tearing down, dismantling of a tradition of kind of community or local control over oil and gas activities, I thought was just beyond the pale. They didn't touch [unclear] [Laughs].

Interviewer: Professor Adam Briggle reflects on his favorite moments during the fracking controversy.

Briggle: But what I really look back on most fondly on are our meetings that we had every week at the Greenhouse Restaurant, where all of our volunteers--volunteers is maybe not the right word--our fellow citizens would meet. And we'd

go over the plan for that week, where we were going to distribute literature, what the talking points are, what we are seeing the industry doing. And there was a sense I got, that I had never had before, of kind of political friendship, or I'll call it just citizenship. These are people who are all pulling together as a community, a real community, like an extended family almost, and just that feeling of camaraderie and friendship I think is the most enduring, sort of, legacy.

[End of interview]