

Editorial: Biden energy plan needs response from governor, candidates

President Donald Trump has made domestic oil and gas production a centerpiece of his administration, moving the United States closer to energy independence. His position means the country is much less at the mercy of other oil-rich regimes but has attracted criticism for not focusing more on renewables.

Joe Biden, the former vice president who seeks to replace Trump in the White House, has a very different view on fossil fuels, pushing a version of the Green New Deal in a world grappling with climate change.

Although Biden recently has stressed he would not support a ban on fracking – no doubt irritating some in his progressive base but making him more palatable to energy-producing states – his current position is to end new oil and gas drilling leases on federal land.

The economic impact of that policy on New Mexico, according to a report by the American Petroleum Institute and New Mexico Oil and Gas Association, would be devastating.

Federal lands account for more than half of New Mexico's oil production. The number for natural gas – which is cleaner than coal as an energy source but still emits significant amounts of CO₂ – is even higher according to the report, coming in at 67%.

How do those numbers translate to people? The report's conclusion is that more than 62,000 jobs could be lost under the Biden policy and that the state could face a revenue loss of up to \$1.1 billion. Oil and gas, prior to the big hit by the pandemic-induced recession, accounted for around 20% of the state's budget.

It may take awhile, but the price of oil will rebound as the global economy recovers. And it will continue to play a big role in the world's energy needs. If it's not oil and natural gas produced in the U.S., it will be from Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran and others.

That will be true for years to come even as we push harder to expand renewables such as wind and solar – as we should.

City dwellers in Albuquerque might not think a federal leasing ban would affect them. After all, this isn't the oil patch. Think again. The money generated for the state's coffers

by oil and gas pays a big chunk of the tab for things like K-12 public schools and higher education.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a fellow Democrat, is an ardent Biden supporter and frequently was listed as a possible vice presidential running mate. Unless she moves to a Cabinet position in a Biden administration – if he wins – she will still be chief executive in a poor state that is at the bottom of way too many rankings.

And the math for addressing those problems gets a lot worse under this proposed policy.

So is the governor in favor of this? If it happens does she have a plan?

You won't get much guidance on either question from her response to the report:

“If we are fortunate enough to have a President Biden, the governor knows that will require a close working relationship to both protect our environment and rebuild our state's economy,” a spokeswoman for the governor told Journal reporter Dan Boyd. “We look forward to those discussions and that work.”

Meaning what, exactly?

Is the governor on board with Biden's proposed ban? If so, how do we back-fill that billion-dollar hole in the budget? These are also fair questions for candidates for Congress and the state Legislature.

None of this is to say environmental issues don't have to be considered. They do.

But New Mexicans deserve answers to these questions. Especially as they get ready to cast their votes for candidates up and down the ballot.