

Editorial: Show NM public if oil ban near schools is really warranted

BY **ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL EDITORIAL BOARD**

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Based on what we know, it's tough to tell if the executive order issued last week by Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard banning new oil and gas leases on state trust land within a mile of schools is an environmental safeguard of substance, or a solution in search of a problem.

Garcia Richard said her June 1 order demonstrates a “commitment to the students of New Mexico today — that their health, their access to clean air and water is a right that we should be protecting with our policies.”

We certainly agree protecting the health of children is a paramount priority. But.

- What's the science behind the 1-mile buffer? Why not 10 feet? 10 miles? Push the industry out of New Mexico entirely? Could it be because that would be catastrophic to the state's economy and schools, given oil and gas funds about 40% of the state's budget, 44% of which is dedicated to schools and educators?

As land commissioner, Garcia Richard is getting a \$59,714 salary increase in mid-June, to \$149,714 annually, made possible in large part by booming oil production. Will she give some back if her policy in fact curtails production?

- What school campuses will this actually clean up? The Land Office says there are up to 119 N.M. schools within a mile of oil and gas activity. But those figures include federal, tribal and private land leases, over which the Land Office has absolutely no authority. We have no idea how many schools will be impacted by the 1-mile buffer, because the Land Office apparently doesn't know itself.

Sen. David Gallegos, R-Eunice, says the ban lacked input from local residents. Certainly the oil and gas industry appears to have been blindsided.

Garcia Richard is now calling on state legislators to take broader action to ban oil and gas production around schools. Let's hope she can show her 1-mile ban on state trust

land was more than virtue signaling and is based on science and specific school sites that face threats to clean air and water, and that lawmakers follow suit.

This editorial first appeared in the Albuquerque Journal. It was written by members of the editorial board and is unsigned as it represents the opinion of the newspaper rather than the writers.