

Colorado coalition reactivates to battle anti-fracking initiatives

By Aldo Svaldi

The Denver Post

Business and political leaders across the state are reactivating a powerful electoral coalition to defeat a dozen proposed ballot initiatives they argue will harm the Colorado economy by hampering oil and gas activity in the state.

Coloradans for Responsible Reform, which has successfully fended off several high profile ballot initiatives since 1994, will campaign against measures designed to give local governments greater control over drilling and other business activities.

"It will be a broad-based and diverse coalition," said Kelly Brough, president and CEO of the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce.



In this March 25, 2014 photo, perforating tools, used to create fractures in the rock, are lowered into one of six wells during a roughly two-week hydraulic fracturing operation at an Encana Corp. well pad near Mead, Colo. (Brennan Linsley, Associated Press)

Although self-described as a citizens' brigade, the coalition includes powerful organizations like the Denver Metro Chamber, Colorado Concern, the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry, Action 22, Club 20 and Progressive 15.

Labor unions, agricultural groups, chambers of commerce and health organizations are also among the 55 supporters, a count expected to grow to more than 100 by summer.

Co-chairs of the group include Brough, Greeley mayor Tom Norton, Colorado Concern CEO Tamra Ward, former Denver mayor Wellington Webb, and former Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar.

CFRR is being funded by member contributions and will coordinate its voter outreach with separate campaigns backed by the oil and gas industry, Brough said.

Signatures are currently being collected for as many as 12 proposed ballot initiatives drafted in reaction to increased oil and gas drilling near developed areas. Many, however, are duplicative and not likely to make it to the ballot.

Four would increase the state-mandated buffer zone for wells beyond the 500-feet now required. Six initiatives are variations of a measure to allow local governments to draft rules that are "more restrictive" than state oil and gas regulations now in place.

Russell Mendell, campaign director for Frack Free Colorado, said the various ballot initiatives reflect the grassroots frustration of citizens and communities who feel their concerns about drilling activity are being ignored.

"All other industries need to go through local regulation, but the oil and gas industry argues they should only be regulated at the state level," he said. "People are feeling disenfranchised with the influence of money in politics."

Brough counters that Colorado already has some of the toughest rules on drilling in the country and the state constitution isn't the place for detailed regulation like setbacks.

"I'm not saying we shouldn't be having conversations," Brough said.

More worrisome for the coalition are two initiatives that could target business activity more generally, Brough said.

Ballot question 75 would allow ongoing local elections where citizens can pass rules that can "define or eliminate the rights and power of corporation or business entities" even if those rules supercede state and federal law.

"Question 75 states that any business in a community could have its right to operate eliminated. That's not local control, that's local tyranny," said Norton, in a statement.

Another measure, called 103, would grant citizens in the state the ability to sue over a lack of enforcement of environmental laws, another way to hold oil and gas companies accountable for compliance given a shortage of state inspectors.

Brough said the measure would overturn the long-established precedent of leaving environmental regulation at the state and federal level and could expose businesses to a raft of legal actions.

The debate over oil and gas extraction has intensified in the last few years, with Boulder and Boulder County, Broomfield, Fort Collins, Lafayette and Longmont passing bans or moratoriums.

Since 1994, CFRR has taken on several controversial political issues, most recently raising \$6.8 million to oppose the so-called "ugly three" amendments 60, 61 and 101 in 2010.

The group normally is opposed to measures, but it did advocate in favor of Referendum C in 2005, which provided a reprieve from TABOR restrictions that would have triggered large state budget cuts following the technology downturn.

Aldo Svaldi: 303-954-1410, asvaldi@denverpost.com or twitter.com/aldosvaldi

Battle over oil and gas regs in Colorado loops in political powers

By Mark Jaffe and Aldo Svaldi

The Denver Post

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The battle over what power local governments should have over oil and gas drilling swept through the statehouse Wednesday and out into a statewide campaign to defeat local-control ballot measures.

At the statehouse, negotiations on a bill to give communities a measure of control over oil and gas operations have reached a fever pitch as the end of the legislative session looms.

"We are trying to find a compromise between the oil and gas industry and local governments," Gov. John Hickenlooper said in an interview.

Meanwhile, the industry and its allies are gearing up for a battle to defeat up to a dozen November ballot initiatives that would give towns and counties more power over oil and gas drilling.

The fight over local control in Colorado, simmering for more than two years, is poised to break into, in the words of one statehouse lobbyist, a "statewide food fight."

While Front Range communities — Boulder, Broomfield, [Fort Collins](#), [Lafayette](#), Longmont and Boulder County — have passed drilling bans or moratoriums, the game is now being played from the Eastern Plains to the Western Slope.

"All other industries need to go through local regulation, but the oil and gas industry argues they should only be regulated at the state level," said Russell Mendell, campaign director for Frack Free Colorado, a co-sponsor of one initiative.

"People are feeling disenfranchised with the influence of money in politics," Mendell said.

But Greeley Mayor Tom Norton said the ballot "proposals have nothing to do with local control, but are actually about shutting down any business someone may not like."

Especially irksome to business groups is ballot question 75, which would allow citizens to pass rules that can "define or eliminate the rights and power of corporation or business entities," even if those rules supercede state and federal law.

Norton is a co-chairman of a group of business and political leaders from across the state that announced Wednesday they are reviving a campaign coalition — Coloradans for Responsible Reform — to defeat the ballot measures.

Against this backdrop, a few lawmakers and Hickenlooper are trying to broker a deal that would address some local control issues, but avoid the most sweeping powers proposed by the ballot measures.

"Our goal is to get a deal done before the end of the session," Hickenlooper said. "In the next day or two, we will know if it is going to happen."

U.S. Rep. Jared Polis, a Boulder Democrat who has been a critic of the oil and gas industry in Colorado, said in a statement Wednesday that "a legislative solution is the best option for Colorado and I hope that our elected officials in Denver are able to come to an agreement."

"If they do not," he said, "I am prepared to support a ballot initiative to address this increasingly urgent situation."

The [dozen potential ballot initiatives](#) would amend the state constitution to do things such as mandate setbacks of drilling rigs from homes and give more power to local government to regulate operations.

"These are wrongheaded measures," said Ken Salazar, a former U.S. senator and secretary of the Interior who, like Norton, is co-chairman of CFRR.

Though self-described as a citizens brigade, the coalition includes politically powerful organizations such as the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce; Colorado Concern; Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry; Action 22; Club 20; and Progressive 15.

The coalition, funded by member contributions, will coordinate its voter outreach with separate campaigns backed by the oil and gas industry, said Metro Denver Chamber of Commerce CEO Kelly Brough, a CFRR co-chairwoman. Other co-chairs include former Denver Mayor Wellington Webb and Concern Colorado chief Tamra Ward.

"This is no surprise," said Kelly Giddens, a spokeswoman for Citizens for a Healthy Fort Collins, a co-sponsor of a proposed ballot initiative. "We knew industry would fight back."

"We don't think that the mailers, the robocalls, the TV commercials are going to sway voters," Giddens said. "People are more sophisticated than the industry thinks."

Two ballot initiatives would give local government power over all aspects of oil and gas development, and four would increase the setback requirement for drilling from three to five times the current 500 feet.

Others would enable communities to enact laws more restrictive than state standards or grant citizens the right to sue for enforcement of environmental laws.

The two comprehensive local -control measures are facing legal challenges about whether they comply with state law.

"The ballot initiatives will have both sides spending many tens of millions of dollars. Every time you turn the TV on, you're going to see an ad," Hickenlooper said. "I am not sure that is the best way to settle something.

"If you go to a statewide ballot, you end up with 30-second sound bites."

A group called Coloradans for Local Control has [already aired a TV commercial](#). The group did not respond to an e-mail request for comment.

Meanwhile, at the statehouse, the negotiations over a possible local-control bill have included such topics as giving communities some flexibility on setbacks, the right to regulate nuisance issues — such as noise and light — and the ability to do local inspections, according to people who have reviewed drafts.

"We've tried to get people with differing points of view talking to each other," said state Rep. Su Ryden, D-Aurora, who has been involved in the statehouse negotiations.

It takes a minimum of three days to get a bill through the legislature, Ryden said. As of Wednesday, there were five days left in the session.

"I don't know if the whole legislative effort was to head off the ballot measures, but that train has left the station," said Andy Karsian, legislative coordinator for Colorado Counties Inc., which represents the state's 64 counties.

"We are going to have a discussion about local control in November," he said.

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Business-civic coalition forms to oppose Colorado fracking ballot measures



Ed Sealover

Reporter-*Denver Business Journal*

[Email](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Capitol Business blog](#)

Business leaders have reassembled the powerhouse Coloradans for Responsible Reform to oppose 12 potential oil-and-gas regulation measures that could be on the state's November ballot.

And they have added nontraditional allies such as former U.S. senator and Interior secretary [Ken Salazar](#) to their coalition this year.

The organization so far includes 55 groups ranging from the [Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry](#) to the Eastern Colorado Council of Black Nurses.

It began meeting with news media outlets Wednesday in what co-chairwoman [Kelly Brough](#), president/CEO of the [Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce](#), called its official kickoff.

Educational and marketing efforts will follow in the coming months, she said.

The effort reunites a group of business and civic organizations that has either opposed or backed seven statewide ballot initiatives since 1994 and has won all seven campaigns.

While past efforts have involved the 2005 passage of the Referendum C spending measure and defeat of a [number of major spending restrictions](#) on the 2010 ballot, this latest group is focused on stopping efforts that:

- Could allow local governments to ban fracking;
- Could permit environmental lawsuits over even legal activities; and
- Could let cities ban any for-profit businesses that they don't like.

"This list [of initiatives] is extremely concerning to us in terms of its impact," said Brough, one of a quintet of co-chairs for the effort. "Whether it's framed as local control or setbacks, the real intention of filing these is to create a ban on fracking in Colorado."

The issues CFRR are opposing are:

- Nine proposed measures backed by U.S. Rep. [Jared Polis](#), D-Boulder, that would allow cities and counties to increase setbacks or to limit or prohibit oil and gas development.
- A proposal that would allow cities and counties to define or eliminate the [rights and powers of corporations or business entities](#).
- A proposal to let cities and counties restrict or prohibit the time, place or manner of oil and gas development.
- A proposal that grants any Colorado citizen standing to file lawsuits over the enforcement of environmental laws.

A state title-setting board has approved each of the measures to begin collecting signatures, but proponents have not turned in petitions for any to make the November ballot yet.

The four different efforts have four different sets of organizers, though the backers of each have discussed the idea of seeking help from national organizations for their campaigns.

CFRR organizers sought out Salazar, the former senator and secretary of [U.S. Department of the Interior](#) who [sometimes clashed with oil and gas leaders](#), to be a co-chairman because they believe his activism — along with the co-chairmanship of former Denver Mayor [Wellington Webb](#) — shows the campaign crosses ideological lines.

Colorado Concern President/CEO [Tamra Ward](#) and Greeley Mayor [Tom Norton](#) round out the list of five official campaign leaders.

“I think those speak volumes from many different points of view on the concerns that people see with these ballot initiatives,” Brough said.

CFRR leaders don’t know yet which of the measures, if any, will make the November ballot — especially as legislative leaders continue to try to find consensus on a [proposed local-control bill](#) in an effort to pre-empt the constitutional amendments.

But they expect to have an uphill climb convincing the public to oppose the efforts, as fracking bans and local-control initiatives have proven popular by [passing in five different Colorado cities](#) so far.

Greeley mayor joins group to combat state initiatives to limit oil, gas industry

Greeley Tribune

Greeley Mayor Tom Norton has joined some heavy hitters in a “citizens brigade” to combat initiatives aimed at further regulating oil and gas activities throughout the state.

Roughly 12 initiatives — mostly espousing local control and creating larger setback distances between wells and occupied structures — are headed toward the November election, but only a few will go forward to voters.

The group, Coloradans for Responsible Reform, plans its own lobbying effort to present voters with the ramifications of such measures, which they say could effectively stop oil and gas drilling throughout state — and thus grind the economy to a halt — and create chaos in local government. It’s got the backing of several organizations in a wide variety of Colorado industries.

“The reason it’s so broad is because we want people to understand it’s not just about oil and gas, it is about the economy of Colorado,” said Norton, a co-chairman of the group who is a former Senate president and former director of the Colorado Department of Transportation.

“Oil and gas, particularly in northern Colorado, is the key to our success. Now, we’ve got to do it right, and I have no problem with that, but we can’t just say no. There’s a property right there.

“We’ve got to look at the bigger picture of how we provide jobs and money for schools, and at the same time protect the long-term viability and environment.”

The group formed 20 years ago to fight other issues and has been resurrected to fight this latest round of “anti” measures.

Norton joins former Denver Mayor Wellington Webb, and former U.S. Secretary of the Interior and U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar, among a group of chiefs from a variety of industries and organizations.

More than 55 groups already have joined the coalition from labor, agriculture, chambers of commerce and health organizations. Groups representing roughly half of Colorado’s counties also are on board.

While several measures are lined up for review to be placed on the ballot, only a few will be put there, Norton said.

Once approved, the groups backing the measures will have to collect enough signatures to get the two or three they choose on the ballot.

He said CFRR will gear up to combat those measures as the election gets closer.

“We’ll try to educate people on what will those two or three do and how will they affect the basic economy and jobs in the state, and what’s the relationship between those issues and food on their table. What does that mean to us?”

Norton said the oil and gas industry is heavily regulated and not running amok. And without the industry, Colorado’s economy wouldn’t have recovered so quick after the Great Recession.

“If you look at downturns and recovery, Colorado and particularly rural Colorado has always recovered much later than the rest of the nation,” Norton said. “That has not been true this go-round. We’ve been recovering faster. What is the cause? The cause has been the ability to manage the growth of the oil and gas industry in northern Colorado.”

Norton singled out one initiative, which would grant local communities the right to prevent corporations or businesses from operating in a community.

“These new proposals have nothing to do with local control but are actually all about shutting down any business someone may not like,” Norton said in a news release. “Question 75 states that any business in a community could have its right to operate eliminated. That’s not local control, that’s local tyranny.”

Norton said his role in the group would not take away from his duties as Greeley’s mayor, and he’s not picking sides in a greater debate about oil and gas drilling.

“I don’t think it’s about taking sides,” Norton said. “I’ve got a side for how do we get jobs and provide for the basic economic viability in the community. I’m saying here’s what I think is going to make the difference.”

Coloradans For Responsible Reform To Fight Anti-Fracking Ballot Measures

By [Grace Hood](#)



A rig performs work nearby a neighborhood in Firestone, Colo.

Grace Hood KUNC

A statewide coalition of business and political leaders is banding back together to fight anti-fracking initiatives expected to appear on the November 2014 election ballot.

[Coloradans For Responsible Reform](#) announced Wednesday plans to campaign against ballot measures seeking to give local governments more control over drilling and fracking.

Groups in favor of local control for oil and gas activity are floating about a dozen ballot initiatives right now. Not all are expected to make it to the ballot.

“Local control is a guise really for saying, 'gee if we have local control we can get rid of oil and gas,'" said Tom Norton, mayor of Greeley and co-chair of the group. "But the broader scope is you can't really do that without interfering with the general business — the way general business operates.”

As *The Denver Post reports*, the other co-chairs of the group are Kelly Brough, president and CEO at the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce; Wellington Webb, a former mayor of Denver; Ken Salazar, formerly Secretary of the Interior; and Colorado Concern CEO Tamra Ward. *The Post* also notes that “labor unions, agricultural groups, chambers of commerce and health organizations are also among the 55 supporters, a count expected to grow to more than 100 by summer.”

Coloradans for Responsible Reform was last in the spotlight in 2010 when it opposed the so-called “ugly three” amendments — Amendments 60, 61 and Proposition 101. The issues had to do with how property taxes were raised; revising the current vehicle income and telecom taxes; and state and local debt limitations. Voters rejected all three proposals.

Editor's Note: An earlier version of this post misspelled Former Mayor Wellington Webb's last name.

[DOUBLE DEALING: Progressive Mega-Donor Steyer Readies to End Run Polis, Industry Fracking Negotiations](#)

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The Denver Business Journal reports this morning that **oil and gas investor Jared Polis**, who in the last couple months has also taken on the curious role of Colorado’s frack banner-in-chief, is trying to force energy companies to give in to a new dump of anti-development rules and regulations. He and his Boulder-based accomplice, Democrat Majority Leader Dicky Lee Hullinghorst, are locked in negotiations with industry officials to head off a ballot fight, the *Denver Business Journal* reports.

“Hullinghorst has said for several months that she hoped the Legislature could pass a bill that might persuade authors of several proposed ballot initiatives to withdraw their measures... Congressman **Jared Polis** is backing several measures that would allow local governments to force greater setbacks from well sites and even ban fracking, a process used to extract natural gas from the ground. And another group has proposed a constitutional amendment that would allow local governments to **ban any for-profit businesses** that they view as contrary to cities’ values.”

Nobody will be surprised, though, that environmentalists are quietly double dealing. Polis is only relevant to the conversation because the frack banners need his money. Unfortunately, Polis isn’t the only liberal mega-money-man who wants to ban fracking in Colorado, it turns out. And if the energy industry gives away its shirt in the legislature, expect Steyer to fund the whack-job fractivists’ ballot initiatives anyway.

From the *Daily Caller*:

A Colorado group pushing a ballot measure to allow local governments to ban fracking might soon be getting a windfall from California billionaire Tom Steyer, whose representatives visited the state last week and met those organizing the campaign.

Steyer, a hedge fund manager and an **environmentalist**, has pledged to spend \$50 million of his own money on candidates and causes fighting against climate change. He also vowed to raise an equal amount from other donors.

Advisers to Steyer's nonprofit, NexGen Climate — which has an affiliated super PAC — visited Colorado last week and met with representatives of Local Control Colorado, according to *Environment & Energy Publishing* (E&E).

KDVR's Eli Stokols reported in a long feature in *Politico* that there was a significant effort by Democratic power brokers in the state to get these anti-fracking measures off the ballot, for fear of what it would do to Senator Mark Udall and Governor John Hickenlooper's chances for re-election.

Too bad nobody told Steyer. The Democrats are a disorganized mess of special interest money these days. Jared Polis probably thought he called the shots in Colorado, but today, we find out that Tom Steyer disagrees.