THE SKEPTIC ARENA

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The Texas town that banned fracking (and lost)

By Aleem Maqbool

*When a Texas town voted to ban fracking inside city limits, it was a shock to the oil-friendly state.*

Aleem, when advised of the attack on the World Trade Center on 9/11/01, Bush couldn't pull himself away from reading stories to a class of young schoolchildren. But when he found out about the fracking ban in Denton, Texas, I'll bet he was in the pilot seat of his Cessna within 5 minutes ... in camouflage.

*But the response from the Texas legislature and energy firm has residents questioning what power they have left.*

Aleem, Texas Conservatives have convinced the morons that they are against big government and that they are there to protect the liberty and freedom of American citizens - and the morons eat it up. This event in Denton reveals the truth: Conservatives are only against government intervention when it threatens the profits of the rich. But in defense of oil industry profits, they will use big government in an instant to sacrifice the freedom of their citizens.

How much you wanna bet that in the next election, these morons vote Republican? Any takers?

*The hydraulic fracturing has started again in Denton, and so too have the protests.*

Aleem, when democracy doesn't go the way Conservatives want it to, they always resort to government power to strip freedom from the people, as they did in this case; and then they parade around, waving American flags, and denouncing big government ... and the morons never figure it out.

*Months ago, the town became the first in Texas to ban hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, in their area.*

Aleem, that's called exercising your rights in a Democracy. They didn't want their air, water, and ground contaminated so they took steps to protect themselves.

But the oil companies used their political cronies to wield the power of government and force the people into submission.

*Fracking is a method of shale gas extraction that uses large amounts of water pumped at high pressure into channels drilled into rock to release gas.*

*Traditional and fracking rigs are a common sight in parts of Texas*

*It has been a boon for US energy production*

Aleem, correction: it has been a boon for US "fossil fuel" energy production (you kinda left that part out).

*and the focus of major protest from environmental groups.*

Aleem, let's see: environmental groups vs. a Republican-controlled government that only works for the interests of the very rich and the big corporations.

Gee, I wonder how that one's going to turn out?

*But while this part of Texas is no stranger to oil, the fight back against fracking was driven by extreme proximity.*

*Dr Adam Briggle, was part of a push by some Denton residents to ban fracking. He is also a Denton resident and an environmental studies professor at University of North Texas. Briggle said "There are nearly 300 wells in the city limits of Denton, but this neighbourhood was sandwiched by two gas well pad sites. It was when people saw this and how close to homes they were drilling that we realised we had to look after each other here."*

Aleem, they can't look after each other anymore because Conservatives have made self-defense illegal. Now they can just get used to the smell of napalm in the morning.

*Campaigners turned to the ballot box. They received the required signatures to put a town-wide fracking ban to a vote and took on powerful Texas energy companies.*

Aleem, "powerful" might be an understatement.

*Dr Briggle said "They threw everything at us, but the harder they worked to turn it into a knock-down political fight, the more it turned against them."*

Aleem, that's because the companies don't care. Profits are the only thing they consider important. Lives mean nothing to them.

*In November of last year, Denton voted overwhelmingly to ban fracking, and the drilling stopped immediately. Dr Briggle said "It felt like vindication, an indication that grassroots democracy can still work in this country."*

Aleem, that might have been true in the mid-twentieth century. But ever since Reagan came to power, it's been one long Conservative slide into desolation and despair for the other 99.9% of Americans.

And Conservatives ensured the death of grassroots democracy when they legalized corruption in 2010 in the Citizens United case. Our democracy is now, effectively, a plutocracy ... rule by the rich.

*Not everyone thought so. The very next day, two lawsuits were filed in Austin, the Texas capital. Todd Staples, President of the Texas Oil and Gas Association said "What was at stake here were the rights of those families, mineral owners, that were being denied access to their property which is protected under the US constitution."*

Aleem, before the fracking technique was developed, were those owners being denied access to their property?

I believe the answer to that question would be "No."

So they weren't being denied access - they were being denied the right to use the very profitable fracking technique to extract their product.

And exactly what right is Staples claiming is protected under the Constitution, that is being violated?

*"Our operators were very willing to work to find solutions, but the path that Denton took was unsustainable."*

Aleem, unsustainable for whom?

And if you go back to Dr. Briggle's statement:

*"They threw everything at us, but the harder they worked to turn it into a knock-down political fight ...."*

Aleem, does that sound to you like Staples was telling the truth when he said that they were *"very willing to work to find solutions* ...."

To me that sounds more like a contradiction.

*He [Staples] added that Denton overstepped its rights by banning fracking outright.*

Aleem, which rights were overstepped? The right to self-defense? The right to exercise democracy?

Please clarify.

*Mr Staples has been one of those lobbying not only to overturn the ban in Denton, but also to ensure such a ban never happens again anywhere in Texas.*

Aleem, and if the party that claims to be against big government, needs big government to ensure that the powerful oil companies will not be impeded in their quest to maximize their profits, then Republicans have no problem using government to strip citizens of their rights.

*And he [Staples] has gotten what he wanted. In May, the state passed a bill that in essence, prohibits bans on fracking.*

Aleem, this sounds like something that might have happened in the distant past or in some third world nation. The fact that we are talking about America in the 21st century is just mind-boggling.

I almost feel bad for those people in Denton. Then I remembered how most Texans voted recently, and as much as I hate to say it, they are pretty much getting what they asked for.

This reminds me of the recent Medicaid expansion that Texas lawmakers rejected, which will cost thousands of Texans their lives. I feel bad for the victims, but not for the victims who voted Republican and put these creeps in power in the first place.

*Fracking has undoubtedly revolutionised the energy industry here.*

Aleem, you goofed again ... the "fossil fuel" energy industry.

*But there are questions about the environmental impact and the nuisance of drilling sites near residential areas. It's what moved Denton residents to act.*

*At a site on a hill just outside the town, a tall barricade has been erected. This is the site where fracking was about to begin in November 2014, just as Denton voted for the ban. Just days after it was overturned, trucks and heavy machinery are rolling back in.*

Aleem, allow me a philosophical moment: it's never about what's right or wrong - it's always about ... who has the power.

America had been doing so well in the 20th century. In the 20's The Greedy Rich nearly destroyed the country, forcing Americans to fight back. FDR's New Deal gave Americans a level of equality unmatched anywhere on Earth. America flourished. We had a giant middle class and everyone wanted to come here.

But The Greedy Rich have fought back with a vengeance and have nearly regained everything they lost; and they are fighting to destroy what still stands of the New Deal.

Things haven't looked this bleak since the 1920's.

*There's also a feeling that both the energy companies and politicians who had supported fracking behaved arrogantly.*

Aleem, that is pretty much a hallmark of The Greedy Rich. But, there is no law against being arrogant or ... an entitled asshole.

*Dwight Jillik, who lives close to a fracking site with his wife and two young children says that companies just didn't give a damn.*

Aleem, it's just like I said, their only concern is profit ... not people.

*Texas is a state with a reputation for supporting local control.*

Aleem, that's only true as long as that local control doesn't threaten oil company profits. But, as this event proves, its reputation ... is based on a lie.

*Many Denton residents are angry the fracking has resumed, despite their vote.*

Aleem, wait until after the Koch Brothers buy the 2016 election and secure the final missing piece of the puzzle - the Presidency. Then The Greedy Rich will have total control over the U.S. government.

If you think things are bad now ... you ain't seen nothin' yet. Conservative wet dreams include the removal of social security, welfare, healthcare, labor unions, minimum wages, and public education. Then, when America is back to the way it was in the roaring twenties, they'll start working on undoing other advances; like making abortion and contraception illegal.

*Mr Staples argues the vote to ban fracking in Denton was motivated by scaremongering.*

Aleem, where have I heard that before from Conservatives?

Oh yeah, global warming. They claim that's just scaremongering.

Think about how dishonest these people are: they call proven scientific fact like global warming and fear of fracking - scaremongering, and then try to convince Americans that what they should really fear, what really endangers America, is allowing those icky gay people to get married.

Aleem, don't underestimate Conservatives by buying into their fake stupidity. They are quite devious and know very well what they are doing. In order to survive in a democracy, The Greedy Rich need to manipulate a large voting bloc. Their best chance is to concentrate on the dumbest Americans. That is why they focus their efforts on the devoutly religious and the Confederacy where they play on the emotions and prejudices of America's dumbest rocks.

Until those morons can learn to use their reasoning powers, we will be in for a long, painful battle.

*Staples said "The opponents of the oil and gas industry were providing information that water quality was damaged, air quality was damaged and gave misinformation about what was occurring."*

Aleem, you could put Staples in a Marlboro hat, and sit him down in front of Congress in the 80's and he would be saying nearly the same thing that tobacco companies were telling us then, and, for the exact same reason ... greed.

*But even for many of those with environmental concerns, like Dr Adam Briggle, there is now a new dimension to their outrage over what has happened in Denton. Dr Briggle says "I think the biggest point now is not what the rules are, but who gets to make them." Adding the new law strips Texas communities of their power.*

Aleem, the big boys make the rules: they always have, and until people learn rational thinking skills ... they always will.

*Soon after we spoke to him, Adam Briggle was arrested for blocking an entrance to a fracking site. He has now been released, but admits that it is hard to see what avenues are now available to him and others who do not want fracking near their homes.*

Aleem, I just gave him the answer. Unfortunately that answer, like evolution, is a process that is painstakingly slow. Meanwhile, people will continue to suffer and be sacrificed at the altar ...

of Big Oil.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33140732>

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

A simple strategy could revive first-line antibiotics

The World Health Organization describes antibiotic resistance as a major threat to global public health; bacteria are becoming resistant faster than we can develop new drugs to fight them. This means there is a pressing need to use the antibiotics we already have more effectively.

Researchers have identified a simple way to optimize dosing that could bring back a whole arsenal of first-line antibiotics and preserve last-resort antibiotics in the fight against drug-resistant bacteria. They describe how a computer simulation shows that a dosing regimen based on the recovery time of a target bacteria could eliminate an otherwise resistant strain.

The computer model shows there is a period - before the beta-lactamase degrades the drug - when the bacterium is sensitive to the antibiotic. You can think of this as a race between the cells and the antibiotics. Before their beta-lactamase degrades the antibiotics, the cells are still sensitive and can be killed. But the antibiotics degrade faster than the cell population declines, allowing some cells to survive and repopulate.

When doctors realize an infection is resistant, they often go straight to a last-resort antibiotic. But the study suggests if they were to stick to the first-line antibiotic and change the dosing frequency so each dose hits the bacteria during their recovery period while they are weak, some infections could be cleared without reaching for the last resort.

There are other important considerations when administering antibiotics. For example, doctors need to take care not to wipe out native populations of bacteria that are important for health.

A database of the responses of different strains to different antibiotics could allow the simulation to find the optimum dosing regimen that keeps total exposure to a minimum. It could also show whether multiple doses are likely to work and let doctors know when it is time to reach for the stronger drug.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

Anne Nicol Gaylor (1926-2015) 88 years

She was an American atheist and reproductive rights advocate. She co-founded the Freedom from Religion Foundation and an abortion fund for Wisconsin women. She wrote the book Abortion Is a Blessing and edited The World Famous Atheist Cookbook. In 1985 Gaylor received the Humanist Heroine Award from the American Humanist Association, and in 2007 she was given the George Tiller Award by the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, Pro-Choice America. She is the mother of activist Anne Laurie-Gaylor.

“There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell.

There is only our natural world.

Religion is but myth and superstition

that hardens hearts and enslaves minds.”