

Fracking may be legalized this year

The N.C. House could pass the bill on fracking as early as next week.

By Amanda Albright
Staff Writer

A bill legalizing fracking may become law this year, despite growing opposition from local governments.

Some activists believe the Clean Energy and Economic Security Act is likely to pass the N.C. House of Representatives as early as this week.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Bob Rucho, R-Mecklenburg, was passed by the Senate last week. If the bill becomes law, it would allow companies to obtain shale gas using the controversial drilling method within two years.

"Because of a strong Republican majority, there is a good chance the bill will be passed," said Hope Taylor, executive director for Clean Water for North Carolina. "But we will ask the governor to veto the bill and try to roll back the legislation."

The legalization of fracking has attracted widespread support from many legislators for its proposed economic benefits and environmental impact.

A recent report by the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources concluded that fracking can be done safely in the

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Ellie Kinnaird,
N.C. Senator, D-Orange

state if the certain regulations are in place.

Sen. Harris Blake, R-Harnett, said in an April interview that fracking has provided employment to the areas that utilize the process, while causing minimal harm to the environment.

Gov. Bev Perdue has also expressed support for the use of fracking.

But Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Orange, said Rucho's bill ignored the latest study, released last week, from the U.S. Geological Survey, which found that N.C. would be able to supply the state with gas for as much as 5.6 years — less gas than previous studies estimated.

"They are marching forward, no matter what facts come out," she said. "It's a very serious problem."

Kinnaird said the bill faces widespread opposition from people and municipalities statewide despite the legislative support.

"This is contrary to what the people of the state feel," Kinnaird said of the bill. "There have been hearings across the state and overwhelmingly people said they did not want fracking."

Erin Wynia, a policy analyst for the N.C. League of Municipalities, said her group supports fracking

because of its potential to encourage economic development and create jobs.

But the league wants state and local representation on the bill's newly created Oil and Gas Board — which will oversee the development and regulation of fracking in the state.

If the bill passes, the board will consist of nine appointed members connected to the development of the new industry.

"What would happen is essentially a state-level board making decisions about land uses at the local level," Wynia said. "Local decisions are best made at the local level."

Wynia said this change is supported by several legislators and is likely to be implemented.

Taylor said although the bill is likely to pass, there is growing state and local movement against fracking. She said Stokes County commissioners — all of whom are Republicans — voted to ban fracking.

"Local governments are starting to pay attention to what impact fracking will have on communities."

Contact the State & National Editor at state@dailytarheel.com.

Indian monk artists visit Chapel Hill

By Alex Dixon
Arts Editor

Four monks sit in a circle at the Unity Center for Peace recreating a complex piece of art, the Medicine Buddha mandala, using millions of grains of colored sand.

The large piece of three-dimensional sand art takes five days for eight monks to complete and requires painstaking attention to detail and knowledge of the intricate Medicine Buddha mandala.

The monks are from the Drepung Gomang Monastery in southern India and are part of the Sacred Arts Tour. The year-long tour travels around the country to raise money for the nearly 2,000 monks living at the monastery.

Eve Barkley, organizer of the event, said this is the second year the monks have come to Chapel Hill. She said the monastery sends different monks each year for the tour.

"This is an event that can bring people together in a positive way," Barkley said.

Volunteer Nancy Sherman said the monks stay in homes around the community after finishing their daily painting at the Unity Center.

"It's the most wonderful experience being around them," Sherman said. "They're such peaceful, loving people."



DTH/MELISSA KEY

The monks chant to Buddha until enlightenment is reached and they can begin the process of creating the sacred sand mandala.

Monk Geshe Tsondu said after the mandala is completed, it will be deconstructed, and the sand will be given out to people at a ceremony and returned to the earth by pouring it into a nearby creek.

The monks also create other works of art, such as watercolor paintings and drawings. These pieces, along with other items, are available for purchase at the Unity Center to benefit the monastery.

In 1959, the Dalai Lama fled Tibet, the home of the original Drepung Monastery, with about 100 monks, due to the invasion

of communist China. The Dalai Lama and the refugee monks rebuilt the current monastery in southern India.

The monks from Drepung construct mandalas wherever they believe a need for environmental healing is needed or requested.

The Unity Center is open for the public to watch the painting daily until Friday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. The deconstruction ceremony will take place at the Unity Center on Saturday at 2 p.m.

Contact the Arts Editor at arts@dailytarheel.com.

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