

MY VIEW CHILI YAZZIE

Energy developments can create imbalance with the Earth

By Chili Yazzie

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When I was a young boy growing up in Shiprock, I saw flowers and grasses carpeting the semi-desert open range areas. Rains and snows came when they were supposed to.

Now we are in a prolonged drought. We are in a national sacrifice zone, and we have had to live with the pollution from the power plants, the mining and the oil and gas development for many decades. The carbon and the gases, including methane spewing from these developments, kill the flowers, the rains and the snows.

Our Earth and all life that depends on her life were designed with a fragile equilibrium to perpetuate life. We see clearly that that balance has been dramatically shifted. The imbalance is causing many natural and human-made disasters throughout the world, such as wildfires, extended droughts, extreme weather and rising sea levels. Our rivers and aquifers are being depleted. Humankind, with its industrial and energy development, has upset the balance, causing the climate crisis.

I had hoped the state of New Mexico would legislate conscientious methane and ozone rules that could be an essential part of mitigating the environment-destroying pollution. I understand methane is 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide over a critical near-term time frame. It is public knowledge that oil and gas production sites leak, vent and flare irresponsible amounts of methane.

The wasted methane, which is the primary ingredient in natural gas, could heat every home in New Mexico every year. The volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, that leak alongside methane cause air pollution that exacerbates asthma and other respiratory diseases that many New Mexicans suffer.

My hope is turning to disappointment as it appears now that the state's draft rules would exempt 95 percent of oil and gas wells. This is unconscionable. It is clear the oil and gas lobby with its megabucks is the tail wagging the dog.

The exemptions will disproportionately impact Native and Latino communities, with our children being the most vulnerable. It is not surprising that the corporate big dogs unrelentingly continue their greedy exploitation of the Earth and the more unfortunate members of society.

It is almost too late to recalibrate nature's balance. We must act now if we hope for a future for our grandchildren and generations to come. In our Indigenous ways, whenever we made use of any portion of the Earth, no matter how small, we ensured reciprocity in taking that element, replacing that life force and its energy to maintain the equilibrium. In today's world, we are so far gone from this balance that the Earth — and all who occupy it — are in grave danger.

Chili Yazzie is a grandpa, farmer, Earth defender and community leader in the Shiprock Chapter of the Navajo Nation.