

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

March 26, 2021

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We write in response to the forum held by the Department of the Interior on March 25, 2021 to discuss the federal oil and gas program. A public review process is long overdue, yet the Department should have completed any reviews and associated public comment periods before issuing directives halting the leasing program and creating administrative bottlenecks for existing leaseholders. Given the limited number of participants in this forum, the event was a missed opportunity to hear from those most affected by the Administration's actions. Millions of Americans depend on oil and gas development for employment, stable energy prices, and economic wellbeing. It is critical that you hear from those most impacted to fully understand the consequences of policy decisions made in Washington D.C.

The Department should have invited representatives from state and local governments, many of which rely on mineral revenues to maintain their budgets. Energy-producing states use their share of revenues to support public school funding, public safety, environmental restoration, coastal resiliency, and many other important programs. Oil and gas development also supports a variety of environmental programs at the federal level; for instance, production in the Gulf funds coastal restoration projects and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which was recently granted permanent, mandatory funding in law. It would have been very valuable to hear about the direct impacts of the Biden Administration's actions on these state and local programs during the forum.

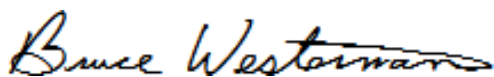
We are also dismayed that the Department did not invite energy operators from the small business community, as well as individually impacted workers from the Western and Gulf regions. Energy production is a national issue, but it is also a local one, and the Administration's actions are likely to hit small businesses and workers the hardest. For instance, the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline resulted in the direct loss of over 1,000 well-paying union jobs, not to mention nearly 11,000 job opportunities that were associated with the project. These job losses are only the beginning if these harmful policies stay in place. Nearly 500,000 jobs across the country could be lost by 2040 if the oil and gas leasing moratorium is made permanent.

Thousands of oil and gas operators in the United States are small businesses with fewer than 20 employees. These operators will be disproportionately impacted by policies like increased royalty rates, hiked fees, and additional uncertainty in the leasing process. According to recent witness testimony in the Committee on Natural Resources, in the state of New Mexico alone, increased federal royalties could drive any number of its 400 independent producers out of business. During this ongoing pandemic, small businesses and individual households are facing more challenges than ever, and their voices must be heard.

Finally, the Department should bear in mind the significant contributions of our federal oil and gas program to domestic energy production. Nearly a quarter of oil and gas produced in the U.S. comes from federal lands and waters, helping us to achieve global energy independence. Domestically produced energy provides greater benefit to the environment as well. Our emissions have been steadily dropping due to immense innovation in the oil and gas sector, and development takes place under vastly superior environmental and humanitarian standards compared to countries like Saudi Arabia and Russia. Handicapping production at home will not eliminate the demand for oil and gas, but merely require that overseas suppliers meet that need, leading to increased global emissions from foreign production and transportation.

A robust federal oil and gas program is vital to the economies of the Gulf coast, Western states, and the U.S. as a whole. We urge you to listen to a variety of impacted voices, not just those most convenient to your messaging, as you consider changes to the Administration's program.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources



Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Member of Congress



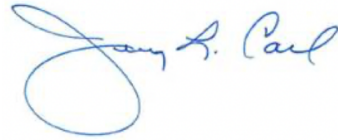
Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress



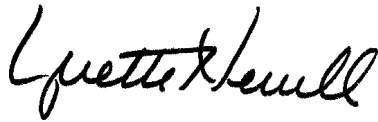
Pete Stauber
Member of Congress



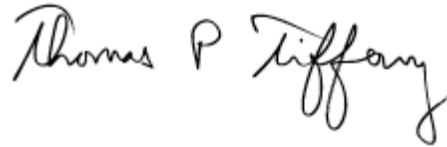
Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress



Jerry Carl
Member of Congress



Yvette Herrell
Member of Congress



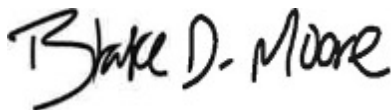
Tom Tiffany
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