

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0609

April 4, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We urge your Administration to finalize pending regulations to modernize the Federal oil and gas leasing system by the end of April. We support the common-sense reforms included in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)'s proposed Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Rule,¹ which will bring enormous benefit to our nation and public lands.

Our public lands are essential to fishing and hunting, wildlife and land conservation, livestock grazing, and our states' outdoor recreation economies. BLM's proposed rule includes important reforms that will save taxpayers money, help ensure lands are used for their highest value, and better protect communities and the environment. Many of these reforms were recommended in the Department of Interior's (DOI) review of the Federal oil and gas leasing program, released in November 2021.² That review was bolstered by an earlier Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, focused on the need for updated bonding rates.³ These reports illustrate how the current oil and gas leasing program shortchanges the American public, locks up thousands of acres of land that could be put to other uses, invites speculation, and often leaves taxpayers on the hook to pay the cost of reclaiming orphaned wells and restoring surrounding lands and waters.

The proposed rule implements critical reforms included in the *Inflation Reduction Act*, such as an increased royalty rate on par with state rates, a realignment of rents and minimum bids to account for decades of inflation, a prohibition on non-competitive leasing, and a new fee to ensure oil and gas operators carefully consider the lands they nominate for lease. The proposed rule also uses existing authorities to:

- Increase outdated minimum bonding rates to ensure that oil and gas companies – rather than taxpayers – pay the costs of well clean-up and remediation;
- Focus leasing decisions away from lands with little potential for oil and gas production, wildlife habitat, cultural resources, and other sensitive places;
- Limit access to the leasing program for operators with a history of noncompliance and abuse.

¹ <https://www.blm.gov/onshore-oil-and-gas-leasing-rule>

² <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/report-on-the-federal-oil-and-gas-leasing-program-doi-eo-14008.pdf>

³ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-615.pdf>

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These reforms are critical to update and improve the oil and gas leasing program to help ensure it better supports the needs of our communities, while protecting the environment and our public lands. They are also broadly supported by voters across the West. Colorado College's Conservation in the West Poll recently found that 90 percent of surveyed voters in eight Mountain West states support requiring oil and gas companies,⁴ rather than federal and state governments, to pay for clean-up and land restoration costs after drilling is finished. In addition, over 260,000 Americans submitted public comments for the record on the BLM's proposed rule — the vast majority of which are supportive of the rule.

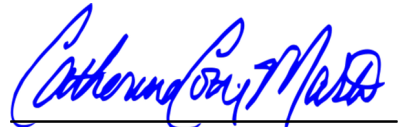
We applaud BLM for moving forward with long overdue reforms to the onshore oil and gas leasing program, and urge your Administration to move quickly to finalize the agency's proposed rule.

We look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

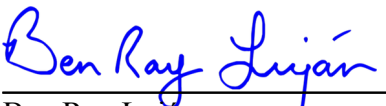
Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

⁴ https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/_documents/2024-poll-data/2024%20National%20Press%20Release.pdf

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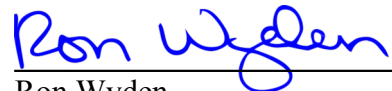
John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



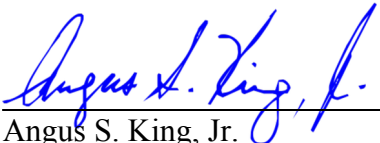
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



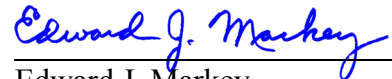
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



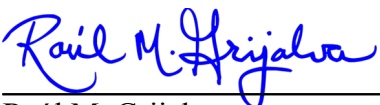
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



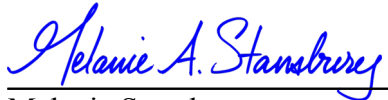
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



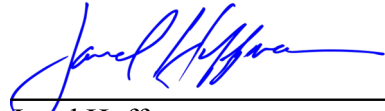
Mike Levin
Member of Congress

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Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



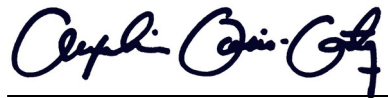
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Katie Porter
Member of Congress



Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Susie Lee
Member of Congress



Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress

CC:

Secretary Deb Haaland, Department of the Interior

Director Tracy Stone-Manning, Bureau of Land Management