

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Bill Groffy
Acting Director
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

November 24, 2025

Dear Secretary Burgum and Principal Deputy Director Groffy,

We write to express strong opposition to the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) proposal to rescind the oil and gas bonding requirements in the *2024 Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Rule*. These requirements reflect input from Western communities and public lands advocates to promote responsible oil and gas production and good stewardship of taxpayer dollars. Reversing oil and gas bonding requirements would undo the first meaningful progress in decades toward ensuring fiscal accountability for oil and gas operations on federal lands.

For years, we have championed stronger bonding standards to make sure oil and gas companies—not taxpayers—pay the true costs of cleaning up oil and gas drilling on federal lands. In 2022, the *Oil and Gas Bonding Reform and Orphaned Well Remediation Act* was introduced in the Senate to increase woefully outdated bonding rates. The *2024 Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Rule* built directly on these efforts by modernizing federal bonding requirements for the first time since the 1950s and 1960s to better reflect the actual cost of reclamation, which frequently exceeds \$300,000 per well. The Government Accountability Office has repeatedly warned that outdated bonds leave taxpayers responsible for cleanup when

operators walk away. Rescinding this rule would reverse this important step and shift the financial burden back onto taxpayers.

Requiring sufficient bonding for oil and gas drilling reflects the fairness and accountability that define Western values. People across the West overwhelmingly support these reforms, with 90 percent of Westerners believing oil and gas companies should pay to clean up their own drilling sites, and nearly three-quarters considering the impacts of oil and gas development on land, air, and water to be a serious problem. When BLM finalized the 2024 rule to cover bonding on federal lands, it received more than 260,000 public comments, with more than 99 percent in support of the reforms. Weakening these standards would ignore the will of the American public and reward irresponsible use of public lands – which Westerners have consistently rejected.

Rolling back the 2024 bonding requirements would also worsen the public safety risks and fiscal threats of orphaned wells. As of September 2024, more than 10,000 idle wells sit on our national public lands, and as an oil and gas executive acknowledged in a recent industry survey, that number is expected to grow over time¹. Before bonding requirements were strengthened, a report from Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship found that cleaning up existing wells could cost taxpayers as much as \$15 billion. Repealing these reforms would push those costs back onto the public and increase the risks of harmful methane leaks, water contamination, and degraded habitat across the West.

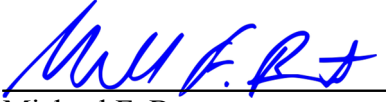
Many states, including both Colorado and North Dakota, recognize the risks posed by inadequate bonding and orphaned wells and have enacted strong state-level bonding rules for oil and gas production. In Colorado, the State designed standards to account for and not duplicate federal standards, and the rollback of the federal bonding requirements would undermine public confidence in the broader financial assurance regime. Keeping the bonding requirements as enacted in the 2024 rule provides regulatory stability and predictability for industry.

The bonding requirements in the *Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Rule* represent a balanced, responsible approach to energy development, which is grounded in fiscal prudence, environmental stewardship, fairness to the American people, and a responsible approach to public lands management. We strongly urge you to maintain the rule's bonding requirements and reject any effort to roll them back. Doing so will protect taxpayers, honor the values of the West, and safeguard our land and water for future generations.

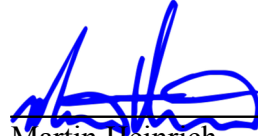
¹ <https://www.dallasfed.org/research/surveys/des/2025/2503#tab-questions>

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



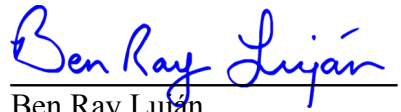
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator