

September 21, 2020

Dear Senator:

We, the undersigned organizations, on behalf of our millions of members across the United States, many of whom are directly impacted by oil and gas development, urge you to support the *Oil and Gas Bonding Reform and Orphaned Well Remediation Act*. Orphaned oil and gas wells have been an issue for decades due to insufficient bonding requirements that have not been updated since the 1950s and the 1960s. Wells without dedicated funding to plug and reclaim them often sit unmonitored for years or decades, leaking oil, gas, and brine that can pollute drinking water, contaminate land and the air, pose risks to public health and safety, and contribute to climate change. This legislation, led by Senator Bennet, will establish an official orphaned well clean-up fund and strengthen oil and gas bonding requirements, creating a direct solution to the orphan well reclamation crisis.

Companies should pay to clean up their oil and gas operations, *not* taxpayers or landowners. With oil and gas demand falling dramatically during the pandemic, thousands of oil and gas wells are being idled and not all operators are able to properly plug and reclaim them. In many cases, operators are going bankrupt and leaving behind newly orphaned wells with not enough funds for plugging and reclamation, costing workers their jobs and shifting the clean-up costs to taxpayers. Typically, taxpayer dollars end up being used to clean up well sites, or reclamation needs simply go unaddressed. But this situation is *not* new; the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had documented 296 orphaned federal oil and gas wells, and the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission (IOGCC) had documented nearly 57,000 orphaned wells on tribal, state, and private lands. There is a clear need to begin addressing orphaned well clean-up and reclamation, improve the inventory and cataloguing of idle and orphaned wells, update federal bonding requirements, and create jobs as our country transitions out of the pandemic.

This bill is a two-pronged solution to this decades-long problem. First it establishes a new orphaned well fund and strengthening oil and gas bonding requirements – that will help fix the problem now and into the future. This will, in turn, create critically needed jobs, as thousands of oil and gas workers are now out-of-work as oil and gas bankruptcies continue to pile up. Specifically, the legislation would establish a new fund that will allow states, tribes, and federal agencies to create jobs by identifying and reclaiming orphaned wells and associated impacted infrastructure. Further, the bill will strengthen federal oil and gas bonding rules, which were last updated in 1951 with minor changes in the 1960s. This will help shift the burden of paying for reclamation costs from taxpayers and back to the oil companies by eliminating nationwide bonds, increasing the minimum value of statewide bonds adjusted for inflation, and improving data collection to identify and remedy orphaned wells.

Across the country, the environmental costs of orphaned wells are increasing. As more wells become orphaned due to the current economic downturn, these wells could pollute groundwater, leak methane and toxic gases, and endanger wildlife. This bill begins to uncouple and solve this problem by putting disaffected workers back to work and cleaning up impacted public lands so they can be used to help mitigate the climate crisis, and requiring stronger security deposits from industry to protect our public lands and waters. We urge you to support the *Oil and Gas Bonding Reform and Orphaned Well Remediation Act*.

Sincerely,

Clean Water Action
Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
Colorado Wildlife Federation
Conservation Colorado
Earthjustice
Earthworks
Environmental Defense Fund
Friends of the Earth
Green Latinos
Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO)
League of Conservation Voters
National Audubon Society
Natural Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
National Wildlife Federation
Nevada Wildlife Federation
New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light
New Mexico Voices for Children
New Mexico Wildlife Federation
Northern Plains Resource Council
Powder River Basin Resource Council
ProgressNow New Mexico
Rocky Mountain Wild
San Juan Citizens Alliance
Sierra Club
The Wilderness Society
Vet Voice Foundation
Western Colorado Alliance for Community Action
Western Leaders Network
Western Organization of Resource Councils
Western Values Project
Wilderness Workshop