



HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
CLIMATE CRISIS

Opening Statement of Chair Kathy Castor
Hearing on “State Perspectives on Cutting Methane Pollution”
June 14, 2022

As prepared for delivery

I’m excited to recognize our two distinguished guests for this important hearing so we can learn from them: Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, of New Mexico, and Governor Mark Gordon, of Wyoming. Thank you for being here to share your unique perspectives on climate solutions.

We often focus on carbon dioxide as the main driver of the climate crisis. But it’s also critical that we address methane, the second-largest source of heat-trapping pollution. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas and is responsible for about 30% of global warming in the modern era. And while it leaves the atmosphere faster than CO₂, it traps 87 times as much heat while it lingers. Last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change urged us to work to reduce this super-pollutant. And while the Biden administration, Congress, and many states have adopted policies to reduce methane pollution and energy waste, methane levels have jumped dramatically over the past decade and emissions remain at the highest levels on record.

Fortunately, there are cost-effective ways to dramatically reduce methane pollution from the oil and natural gas sector, which remains the largest industrial methane source in the United States. Fossil fuels were responsible for approximately 80% of the increase in methane emissions between 2006 and 2017 across North America, according to analysis from NASA and Stanford. And methane can escape at nearly every stage during the production, transmission, and distribution of oil and gas. These leaks add up. Producers could have sold an additional 180 billion cubic meters of natural gas – the equivalent of the entire European gas market – if all leaks from global fossil fuel operations had been captured last year, according to the International Energy Agency. And according to a separate IEA analysis, the oil and gas industry could slash its methane emissions in half at no net cost just by deploying existing technologies.

Taking these actions has broad support. Last year, we voted to require companies to regularly find and repair methane leaks. Major oil and gas companies supported the measure, but only 12 House Republicans voted for it. Our friends across the aisle often call for expanding production of natural gas as a solution to the climate crisis, but unless harmful methane pollution is addressed, the climate impacts of gas can be worse than the coal it may replace.

Plugging methane leaks is low-hanging fruit and it is good for producers’ bottom line. And because of Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, it’s now a security imperative as well. Capturing wasted methane could meet more than half of President Biden’s LNG commitment to Europe. Stopping energy waste will help both everyday Americans and our allies abroad. It will also support good-paying jobs across America. Those jobs include plugging and remediating abandoned wells,

expanding leak detection and repair, and increasing maintenance and inspections. According to BlueGreen Alliance, unleashing this potential could create 50,000-plus jobs over a decade. Repairing and replacing leaky natural gas distribution pipelines could create 300,000 more.

That “win-win” scenario is one of the reasons we invested \$4.7 billion to help states and tribes plug and remediate abandoned oil and gas wells in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. We also invested more for abandoned mine land reclamation, for natural gas pipeline modernization, and to mitigate the environmental risks of undocumented orphaned wells.

We’re also excited about progress at the state level. New Mexico now requires regular and frequent leak detection and repair, and a new measure will help eliminate routine venting and flaring across the state. And in Wyoming, state officials stepped up after the Trump administration weakened federal methane safeguards, creating state-level emissions limits and requiring leak detection and repair on new and modified sources.

But there is so much more to be done - and quickly - as the costly impacts of the climate crisis continue to grow and the window to act to avoid the worst impacts is rapidly closing. We need robust federal rules to find and repair leaks from both new and existing sources, including marginal wells. And we need to end routine venting and flaring, which wastes energy and harms public health.

I look forward to today’s discussion.