

**Chairman Alan S. Lowenthal**  
**Statement and Script**  
**Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Oversight Hearing:**

***Oil and Gas Development: Impacts of Business-as-Usual on the Climate and  
Public Health***

**July 16, 2019**

The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources will come to order.

Today the Subcommittee is holding its fourth hearing in its series on the impacts of oil and gas development, with this afternoon's focus on climate change and public health.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member or their designees.

I ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5:00 pm today. [*pause*] Hearing no objection, so ordered.

First, I would like to welcome our witnesses and particularly thank those of you who traveled great distances to be here today.

The Committee held several hearings in February on the impact climate change is having on America's public lands, waters, wildlife, and communities.

However, one topic we did not consider was how federal fossil fuel production contributes to the climate crisis.

Last week, we discussed how federal coal is the source of 13 percent of our country's greenhouse gas pollution.

And today, we'll hear testimony on how oil and gas on public lands produce another 10 percent of all U.S. emissions.

That's 23 percent just from fossil fuel production on public lands.

While that production is local, typically in the Gulf of Mexico or the Mountain West, the impacts are being felt by all Americans.

Climate pollution from Louisiana's offshore oil production degrades air quality in cities like Atlanta and Los Angeles.

Climate pollution from Colorado's natural gas extraction increases the range of insect-spread diseases in New England.

And climate pollution from New Mexico's leaky infrastructure and gas flares intensify hurricanes that batter the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

More than 70 medical and public health organizations recently issued a call to action, calling climate change quote "the greatest public health challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

For too long, the Department of the Interior has supported more oil and gas drilling while scientists sound the alarm and tell us to reduce emissions.

The last four years have been the four hottest years ever recorded. June 2019 is now the hottest single month on record, a record that, sadly, will probably not last that long.

During the Obama administration, the Interior Department balanced its stewardship responsibilities with the management of immense oil and gas reserves.

The Bureau of Land Management developed rules to reduce methane emissions and promote renewable energy.

The U.S. Geological Survey led cutting-edge climate research and was free to use the term “climate change.”

And the Fish and Wildlife Service took steps to protect species most at risk from droughts and wildfires.

But in 2017, the Trump administration brought this progress to a grinding halt.

Since then, the administration has championed a fossil fuel agenda and pumped millions of tons of additional emissions into the atmosphere.

Interior has repealed oil and gas safeguards, opened sensitive lands to leasing, and suppressed climate science.

Secretary Bernhardt admitted he doesn't lose sleep over the planet reaching the highest carbon dioxide levels in human history.

Most people who accept the threat of climate change agree the Interior Department needs new leadership.

But just as critical as the need for new leadership is the need for a new approach to our public lands.

While staying on the current path is unsustainable, returning to the strategies of the past won't get the job done either.

If we don't do something different, public lands and waters will continue to be part of the climate problem, not part of the solution.

So how can the Interior Department look towards improving the future rather than repeating mistakes of the past?

By updating prices for public oil and gas resources to reflect the cost of climate damages.

By prioritizing and rapidly expanding clean energy development out west and off our coasts.

By protecting large areas of forests and grasslands and using their natural ability to store carbon for our benefit.

And by supporting states, tribes, and local communities that will be impacted by a transition away from oil and gas extraction.

Every day we fail to tackle climate change, we lock in more warming that weakens our nation and undermines the health of our children and future generations.

The time to act is now, and we can lead the way.

With that, I look forward to the testimony from our witnesses, and I now recognize Ranking Member Gosar for his opening statement.