

Chairman Alan S. Lowenthal
Statement and Script
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Legislative Hearing
H.R. 5636, *Transparency in Energy Production Act*

January 28, 2020

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

Today the Subcommittee is holding its first hearing in 2020 on H.R. 5636, the Transparency in Energy Production Act – legislation I introduced earlier this month.

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.

I also ask unanimous consent for Congressman Ben Ray Lujan to sit on the dais and participate in this morning's hearing. [*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.

My bill, on its face, is simply about transparency. It's about making sure that companies operating on America's public lands tell the public basic information about how they run their operations.

But it's actually about much more than that.

The bill is about protecting public health, safeguarding the environment, and trying to keep the devastating impacts of climate change in check.

The oil and gas industry has, for years now, touted natural gas as the solution to climate change.

They point out, quite rightly, that burning natural gas produces fewer carbon emissions than burning coal.

But they don't point out that there's a catch.

Methane, the main component of natural gas, is a powerful greenhouse gas – much worse for our climate than carbon dioxide.

In fact, over a 20-year period, it's 86 times stronger than carbon dioxide at trapping heat.

This means that once a little bit of methane leaks – as little as 3 percent – you're no better off for the climate than going back to coal.

And it's not just about the climate.

Methane is the main component of natural gas, but it's not the only component of natural gas.

When methane leaks, benzene leaks. Hydrogen sulfide leaks. Other toxic volatile organic chemicals leak.

And the people who live near oil and gas sites breathe these in. Or they breathe in the ozone that these chemicals help create.

And they complain of nosebleeds, nausea, and more serious health problems. And their children have to go to the emergency room because of asthma attacks.

I saw, and smelled, some of this firsthand last year in New Mexico.

I went to a well pad not far from Chaco Canyon on a beautiful clear spring day – and I saw some pipes and wellheads and storage tanks, and nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

But then I looked through an infrared camera, and instead of a beautiful landscape I saw billowing clouds of gas pouring out of all of this equipment.

Methane – clear as day but invisible to the naked eye – was leaking unchecked into the air.

Methane has no odor, but as I got closer, I could smell some other chemicals that felt like they were making me sick.

I was able to get back in the car and drive away. The people who live near there don't have that option.

The oil and gas industry likes to say they have this under control. It's just a few bad actors, or we're exaggerating, and don't worry, they've got this.

The industry shows us data from the Environmental Protection Agency saying that methane emissions are down 14 percent since 1990, even as natural gas production has more than doubled.

They don't like looking closer at that data, though. Because it shows that all the reductions in methane emissions have come from better practices in transmission and distribution.

What we're talking about – the emissions of methane from wells and equipment in the field – the E-P-A data shows those emissions have increased by over 30 percent since 1990.

Unfortunately, even that E-P-A data is largely an estimate. We don't know exactly how much methane companies are leaking, because there's no requirement for them to find out. And even if these companies look into it, there's no requirement to let nearby communities know.

That's why we need the Transparency in Energy Production Act.

And it's not just about methane. It's about transparency across the board.

In 1986, President Reagan signed the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act.

The name of that law says it clearly: communities have a right to know what is being released into their own backyards.

And the evidence has shown that requiring public disclosure helps drive down pollution.

In the first 20 years after that law was signed, pollution releases dropped 59 percent.

So, if the oil and gas industry and my friends on the Republican side are going to oppose strong regulations to cut down directly on methane emissions, and claim that the data supports them on that, then I hope they'll support getting better data and giving it to the public.

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