

**Statement– Chair Alan S. Lowenthal**

**Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Oversight Hearing**

*The Federal Coal Program: A Bad Deal for Taxpayers and Threat to Climate*

**October 27, 2021**

Next week, President Biden, several cabinet members, and a Congressional delegation will travel to Glasgow, Scotland for COP twenty-six, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

At the convention, the President will present the United States' commitments and contributions to achieving global net-zero emissions by mid-century, the goal of the legally binding Paris Agreement, which we re-entered on President Biden's first day in office.

There is no debate – climate change is here, and things could get a lot worse if we don't work to drastically cut greenhouse gas pollution.

This year alone, there have been eighteen weather disasters costing more than one billion dollars and resulting in over five hundred deaths.

If we don't do everything we can to curb emissions, these record-breaking disasters will be dwarfed by the climate emergencies to come and even more American lives will be lost.

That's why President Biden has committed to a fifty to fifty-two percent reduction of emissions by 2030 and one-hundred percent carbon pollution-free electricity by 2035.

We have no time to waste.

Reaching these goals will take a whole-of-government approach. We need to decarbonize every single sector of the U.S. economy.

Fossil fuels on public land have a big role to play in this energy transition, especially the federal coal program.

In the U.S., coal is our most carbon intensive fossil fuel resource.

Today, we only get about twenty-five percent of our electricity from coal, yet it accounts for approximately sixty percent of the sector's emissions.

Over forty percent of all coal mining in the United States happens on public lands.

The U.S. Geological Survey found that the federal coal program alone is responsible for thirteen percent of our total greenhouse gas pollution.

That is staggering.

And a huge responsibility for the federal government.

And a huge problem for the climate.

Coal on public land is managed and leased by the Bureau of Land Management.

In August, B-L-M initiated a long-overdue review of the program.

B-L-M has not completed a formal review of the federal coal program since 1979. The last attempt, by the Obama administration, was stopped dead in its tracks by the Trump administration.

I commend the Department of the Interior for taking this first step.

But I think it is abundantly clear what that review will find: The federal coal program is completely incompatible with our nation's climate goals and it is a bad deal for taxpayers.

It is time to end all new federal coal leasing on public lands.

There is enough federal coal under lease today to support at least twenty more years of mining.

Workers and communities are being hit hard by the decline of coal. They need new opportunities and diversified economies, and they need them now.

They deserve more than empty promises that coal is coming back.

The leasing process itself is harmful to taxpayers. It's a system where 90 percent of the so-called competitive lease sales have only one bidder and royalties are set outrageously low.

It allows for completely inadequate bonding requirements that leave taxpayers at risk of picking up the tab for mine cleanup when coal companies inevitably go bankrupt.

The federal coal program is simply not smart for taxpayers or for ensuring that we leave a recognizable world for future generations.

Of course, there will be communities significantly affected by the decline of coal. These communities – already dealing with job loss and degraded environments, must also be the focus of B-L-M's review.

We must consider phasing out the federal coal program in a responsible, thoughtful way that protects workers, guarantees mine cleanup, and addresses climate change.

Today, we'll hear from multiple witnesses with firsthand accounts of the effects of federal coal leasing on their land and for their communities.

We'll also hear from a renowned climate scientist who can go deeper into the reasons why coal leasing is incompatible with our international climate agreements, and why phasing out the program is essential for the future of our planet.