

RM Westerman – Opening Statement for the Record

EMR Legislative Hearing 7.19.22

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses for participating in the hearing. Today, we are considering four bills, three of which I am pleased to say I support.

I'll start with the Enhancing Geothermal Production on Federal Lands Act, sponsored by my colleague from Idaho, Congressman Fulcher. This bill is an important step to increase geothermal energy production by streamlining the lengthy permitting process for the testing phase of geothermal energy development. Specifically, this bill creates a categorical exclusion for geothermal test projects on federal land and directs the Secretary of the Interior to establish priority areas for geothermal development.

Next, I want to thank the majority for including the Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform (FLAIR) Act in today's hearing. I am proud to be co-leading this bipartisan effort with Representative Kind. The FLAIR Act addresses the lack of a comprehensive inventory of the federal government's land and property assets. The Department of the Interior alone uses more than 100 different property management systems and 26 different financial management systems nationwide.

This number is greatly magnified when we multiply it by all of the other agencies and departments spread across the federal government. To make matters worse, none of these systems communicate with one another.

The truth is that the federal government does not have a full picture of the lands it owns, the location of those lands, or the condition of those lands. This leads to confusion over land ownership and poor management decisions, which ultimately harms all of our districts. The federal government wastes an estimated \$2 billion of taxpayer funds every year maintaining unneeded properties, and that doesn't even include the large amount of federal lands that have been identified as suitable for disposal.

The FLAIR Act will consolidate thousands of different information systems into one comprehensive database that will categorize and update federal land and real property assets. This searchable online system will provide transparency and clarity for the public by eliminating discrepancies between federal departments that maintain their own separate databases and allowing everyone to access comprehensive data, including accurate maps showing all land and properties owned by the federal government. The FLAIR Act will empower our federal agencies to make choices faster and easier, which will lead to savings for the

American taxpayer. A full accounting of federal lands will also enable state and local communities to more effectively pursue additional land exchanges to manage for recreational and economic benefits. This is a commonsense bill that represents a return to good governance.

We will also consider H.R. 3681, the Sinkhole Mapping Act of 2021, sponsored by Congressman Soto. This is a bipartisan bill to examine short and long term causes of sinkholes and identify higher risk areas. Sinkholes are a dangerous natural hazard that have cost an average of \$300 million in damages every year for the past 15 years, and possibly much more than that. This legislation will help us predict sinkholes so that we can be better prepared to mitigate the effects.

Finally, we will debate H.R. 5805, the Buffalo Tract Protection Act, sponsored by Congresswoman Stansbury. Unlike the other bills at this hearing, this legislation poses a number of concerns. H.R. 5805 would withdraw nearly 4,300 acres of federal land from mineral development, preventing the development of gravel mines and threatening the state of New Mexico's ability to acquire low-cost construction materials. I oppose this bill and urge my colleagues to consider the effects on infrastructure costs in New Mexico if this bill were passed, especially

considering the predicted population growth in the area and the recent passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Mr. Mike Nedd is testifying today on behalf of the Bureau of Land Management.

This administration continues to do everything in its power to avoid issuing new onshore oil and gas leases, despite requirements in law to hold lease sales every quarter. This is in the middle of a global energy crisis and soaring gas prices. I urge BLM to issue the leases won in the recent round of lease sales as soon as possible and promptly complete regulatory review for the next round of mandated onshore oil and gas lease sales.

Thank you and I yield back.