

Statement to the House Natural Resources Committee from a Grand Valley Constituent Opposing Rep. Boebert's Bill and Appropriations Riders

To the esteemed members of the House Natural Resources Committee,

I write to you as a concerned constituent from Colorado's Third Congressional District, specifically the Grand Valley region, to express my profound opposition to Representative Lauren Boebert's draft bill and any potential appropriations riders aimed at repealing the essential leasing and bonding reforms initiated by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The proposed BLM Onshore Oil & Gas Leasing Rule, released in July, addresses long-standing issues within our region. It establishes higher minimum bond amounts for operators, a critical step forward given the woefully inadequate bond amounts of the current rules. Under the existing regulations, reclamation bonds can be as low as \$10,000 for all wells on a single lease and a mere \$150,000 to cover all wells nationwide. Such outdated amounts fail to ensure that the costs of cleanup are adequately met when operators cease operations.

BLM's proposed rule increases the minimum lease bond amount to \$150,000, aligning with modern environmental responsibility and fairness to taxpayers. It rightly acknowledges that the costs of reclamation should be an integral part of doing business for oil and gas companies profiting from our public resources. Additionally, BLM's draft rule includes Surface Owner Protection Bonds, which address the concerns of landowners above federal minerals. Nevertheless, raising the minimum bond amount to \$10,000 would provide even better protection for these private lands against potential damages resulting from oil and gas development.

This reform not only sets a vital precedent but also mitigates future liabilities for taxpayers as we transition to renewable energy sources. The International Energy Agency's prediction of peak fossil fuel production by 2030 underscores the urgency of addressing financial assurance for reclamation. Without adequate bonds in place, taxpayers may bear the full brunt of cleanup costs when companies abandon wells as demand diminishes.

Dr. Barbara Vasquez testified in front of you all less than two months ago with the following, accurate, illustration: *Would a landlord rent a house without a cleaning and damage deposit? Would that deposit remain the same as it was in 1960? Certainly not. Similarly, bonding levels must evolve with the times to ensure that taxpayers are not left shouldering the financial burden of reclamation.*

Representative Boebert's draft bill and potential appropriations riders, aimed at repealing these essential leasing and bonding reforms, present a misguided path for Colorado and our nation. While the promise of slightly lower energy prices may seem appealing, the hidden costs of these measures far outweigh any marginal savings. They risk shifting the financial burden of environmental damage from the oil and gas industry to taxpayers. In a time when addressing climate change is indisputably urgent, we cannot afford to take steps backward. We must

prioritize responsible reforms and safeguard our environment and the well-being of our communities for generations to come.

In Western Colorado, encompassed by Representative Boebert's district, we pride ourselves on some of the best oil and gas practices in the nation. However, there is still a buildup of orphaned and abandoned wells spewing toxic chemicals into the air. These issues are addressed with operator cleanup or taxpayer funding, which places a massive strain on our financial resources.

It is disheartening to witness Representative Boebert prioritize special interest groups' influence, particularly the Western Slope, Colorado Oil and Gas Association (WSCOGA), and others who hold their cultural identity and personal values as oilfield workers above the interests of our broader community. As someone whose family has relied on the energy industry to make ends meet and provide for others, I deeply resent her lack of foresight.

The paycheck gains are unlikely to outweigh the burdens of marginal energy savings on our monthly bills, not to mention the burden of medical expenses when air pollution contributes to declining lung health and places a perpetual taxpayer burden on cleaning up after oil and gas operators.

If Representative Boebert believes that this commonsense reform will disproportionately affect job opportunities in her district, she should seek alternative solutions that genuinely make a meaningful and lasting difference. Our community, our nation, deserves thoughtful leadership that prioritizes the health, well-being, and economic stability of its constituents over narrow interests.

Thank you for considering my perspective and for your commitment to responsible governance.

Sincerely,

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