

Opening Statement  
Ranking Member Ocasio-Cortez  
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Legislative Hearing  
October 25, 2023

Thank you, Chair Stauber, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today to discuss four bills that cover a range of issues within our jurisdiction, including geologic mapping, renewable energy, and fossil fuel development on federal land.

I have said it before, and I will say it again: a quarter of this country's carbon pollution comes from fossil fuel development on federal lands and waters. It is long past time we change this.

America's public lands and waters must be part of the climate solution rather than part of the problem. Doubling down on fossil fuels does not make Americans, nor the world, more secure.

American oil and gas production has never been higher – we're the largest producer in the world, and yet, energy prices for Americans have surged while Big Oil's profits have boomed.

We export oil and gas, and we import price volatility. Big Oil is leaving American families to bear the costs of higher energy prices, polluted air, water, soil, and climate disasters.

True energy and economic security will come when we create an equitable, clean energy economy that puts communities first and ends our reliance on this global extractive industry.

Two bills on the agenda today, H.R. 1449 and H.R. 6011, would nominally promote renewable energy development on federal land, but there are significant flaws in both.

H.R. 1449, the CLEAN Act, would increase the frequency of geothermal lease sales on public lands. Recent technological breakthroughs in geothermal drilling make it an increasingly scalable, stable, on-demand form of renewable energy, and I fully support efforts to safely aid geothermal development.

But unfortunately, H.R. 1449 also requires that the Bureau of Land Management approve geothermal drilling permits within 30 days, an arbitrarily tight deadline for an agency that is chronically understaffed and underfunded. It leaves no room for flexibility in the case of complicated analyses or decision-making.

This part of a trend of so-called "streamlining" and "permitting reform" that Republicans have been pushing. Rather than fund agencies for adequate environmental review, let's undercut our bedrock environmental laws and give handouts to private industry.

H.R. 6011, the Right-of-Way Application Transparency and Accountability Act, follows in this trend. It would create a 60-day deadline for the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to notify an applicant requesting a right-of-way to use public land as to whether their application is complete or deficient.

Rights-of-way are authorizations needed before anyone can do an activity that disturbs or damages public lands, like constructing a pipeline or developing solar or wind energy.

Wanting speedy confirmation that an application is complete is reasonable. But similar to H.R. 1449, this bill does not address the root cause of delays at our land management agencies. The bill creates new deadlines for the agency without providing the resources necessary to meet those timelines.

Last Congress, Democrats secured one billion dollars in the Inflation Reduction Act to fund land management agencies and speed up permitting. I encourage the inclusion of additional resources for B-L-M and the Forest Service in these bills to ensure they have the staff needed to promptly and thoroughly review applications, conduct environmental reviews, and consider community input.

Also on the agenda is H.R. 2855, Representative Soto's Sinkhole Mapping Act of 2023. As we near the end of the first session of this Congress, it is a relief to finally consider our first piece of Democratic legislation in this subcommittee.

The Sinkhole Mapping Act is a straightforward, commonsense move to study and map sinkhole risk in the United States. Sinkholes create at least \$300 million in damages every year, but the U.S. does not currently collect data on or map sinkholes, leaving community planners and emergency managers without important safety information.

Despite their flaws, the three bills I've mentioned so far do all share one thing: they all share the intention to build towards a safer, clean energy future.

Unfortunately, the last bill on today's list takes us backwards.

Representative Boebert's so-called "Restoring American Energy Dominance Act" has only one goal: furthering Big Oil's dominance over our public lands.

H.R. 6009 would force B-L-M to withdraw its draft oil and gas rule. The rule is a long overdue reform of our onshore oil and gas program to hold Big Oil accountable for cleaning up after themselves, to provide a fair return to the taxpayer when Big Oil uses our public resources, and to end speculative leasing of our public lands.

The idea that if you make a mess, you should be responsible for cleaning it up is not something that's hard to understand. The idea that private companies should pay American taxpayers for using our public lands is not hard to understand. It's for these reasons that BLM's rule has broad support across Western voters. In fact, 92% of comments provided from all 50 states in response to BLM's proposed rulemaking were in favor of the rule.

For all the talk of the "people's house" that we have been hearing from the other side of the aisle, this bill is anything but. Rep. Boebert's attempt to block this rule is an out-of-touch giveaway to

the fossil fuel industry. It is a blatant effort by Big Oil and corporate lobbyists to game the system in their favor.

I encourage B-L-M to listen to the 92% of stakeholders who support their rule, and to consider a managed decline of fossil fuel production on federal lands that addresses the climate crisis and holds the fossil fuel industry accountable. This rule is an essential step in the right direction.

I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses, and I yield back.