Statement of Representative Katie Porter (CA-45)
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development Members' Day
May 25, 2022

Thank you, Chair Kaptur and Ranking Member Simpson, for the opportunity to testify today.

As you consider our requests for the Energy and Water Development Subcommittee's Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations bill, I urge you to consider my bipartisan request for additional funding for the Department of Energy (DOE)'s efforts to locate abandoned oil and gas wells across the country. This funding will allow DOE to help federal land management agencies, states, and Indian tribes identify orphaned wells that are leaking toxic gases into the surrounding communities. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that there are over 2 million unplugged wells polluting communities around the country.

The Environmental Defense Fund produced a map of the unplugged, documented wells across the country. There are 82,000 wells that are documented on this map.[1] Many documented wells are concentrated in Southern California, where I live with my three children. As you can see, many documented wells are also concentrated in Appalachia. However, this map only shows documented wells. For obvious reasons, it does not include the wells we have not found yet.

The bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provided nearly $5 billion in funding to create a new federal program to address these unplugged wells. This is a historic investment to address a long-standing environmental harm. However, the law only provides $30 million for the Department of Energy to identify and mitigate the environmental risks of undocumented orphaned wells.

My colleagues on the Natural Resources Committee and I have studied this issue closely. In March, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a hearing on this topic. We heard from a witness in that hearing that the $30 million provided by Congress in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law was not nearly enough to locate all of the undocumented orphan wells across the country.

That is why I, along with my colleague Representative Lamb of Pennsylvania, have requested that Congress appropriate not less than $30 million for the Department of Energy to help locate these wells. The unfortunate truth is that even with the historic funding Congress has already passed to address unplugged wells, we will need to invest much more in the years to come to find and plug all of the orphan wells that are leaking in our communities.

Besides the abundant public health benefits from reducing exposure to methane and toxic gases, plugging or capping leaking wells is critical in our fight to reduce the emissions that contribute to climate change. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas which, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency, is more than 25 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping

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[1] Environmental Defense Fund, "Orphan Well Map." Retrieved from: https://www.edf.org/orphanwellmap

heat in the atmosphere. Due to human activities, atmospheric methane has more than doubled in the past two hundred years.[2] While there are many ways to lower our methane emissions, capping wells is one promising step we could take that would also improve the health of our communities.

Before we can plug these wells, however, we have to find them. This additional funding will go to labs like Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in Northern California who have the scientists, data, and expert technology to help identify orphaned wells. This is a smart investment for our country. I urge you to give the Department of Energy the funding needed to support this effort.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.

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[2] US EPA, "Importance of Methane". Retrieved from:
https://www.epa.gov/gmi/importance-methane#:~:text=Methane%20is%20the%20second%20most,trapping%20heat%20in%20the%20atmosphere.