

**Chairman Alan S. Lowenthal
Statement and Script
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Field Hearing:**

Oil and Gas Development: Impacts on Air Quality and Sacred Sites

**Santa Fe, New Mexico
April 15, 2019**

The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources will come to order. I would like to welcome everyone to the first subcommittee field hearing of this Congress, and I would like to thank the Governor and her team, and House Speaker Brian Egolf and his team for welcoming us to the great state of New Mexico and graciously allowing us to use their committee room, and for all their help in making today's hearing possible.

I would also like to thank everyone who helped organize and participated in the events that we held over the weekend, which were all extremely enlightening and allowed us to hear a lot of additional voices regarding the issues facing this area.

I now need to get through a little parliamentary housekeeping, so please bear with me for a second.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member or their designees.

I ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5:00 pm today. [*pause*] Hearing no objection, so ordered.

I also ask for unanimous consent for Congressman Lujan and Congresswoman Haaland to sit on the dais and participate in this morning's hearing. [*pause*] Hearing no objection, so ordered.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on the impacts of oil and gas development on air quality and sacred sites.

Across the west, the availability of oil and gas has been both a blessing and a curse.

These resources are a major component of the economy of many parts of this country, in some places very dramatically, such as the Permian basin in southeastern New Mexico.

There is no question that the oil and gas industry provides jobs along with a huge portion of the energy and products that we still use in our daily lives.

But these benefits also come with significant consequences to our air, our water, the climate, our health, wild natural places, and sacred sites.

Today the subcommittee is holding the first in what will be a series of hearings that will examine the impacts of oil and gas development and serve as a platform to hear from local voices, state officials, tribal members, and experts.

Honestly, I can't think of a better place to hold our first hearing in this series than New Mexico.

New Mexico shows the challenges that exist when balancing vast oil and gas resources with protecting public health, the environment, and cultural resources.

Over the last decade, due in large part to this state, U.S. oil production has more than doubled, and we are now producing more oil and natural gas than ever before.

However, this has brought with it a record amount of methane emissions and other air pollutants that harm the health of local citizens, warm our climate, and waste a valuable public resource.

Methane is a potent greenhouse gas that leads to harmful ground-level ozone, and when it leaks it brings with it other volatile organic compounds and hazardous air pollutants.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, ground-level ozone leads to lung and throat irritation, breathing difficulties, aggravation of asthma, and increased risk of heart and lung disease.

Just yesterday, members of the committee saw these leaks firsthand with infrared cameras.

Last week, new data was released suggesting that methane emissions in New Mexico are five times higher than EPA estimates.

Despite this, the Trump administration appears not to care, and is weakening regulations from both the Bureau of Land Management and Environmental Protection Agency that would have cracked down on methane pollution.

While the federal government refuses to do its job to hold companies accountable, state officials such as Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham are taking the lead, coming up with new ways to reduce the harmful effects of oil and gas development.

The Governor has also led New Mexico to join my own state of California in committing to a 100 percent carbon-free electric grid. The only other state to do that is Hawaii, so I feel like our next field hearing should probably be there.

I really don't think you could ask for three more beautiful states to lead the nation in making our clean energy future a reality, and I just want to say to Chairman

Grijalva that if he wants me to make sure I get to all of them, I will make that sacrifice for the Committee.

Closer to here, one of the most beautiful parts of an already beautiful state, and one that we had the honor of visiting yesterday, is Chaco Canyon.

Unfortunately, it is also one of the areas most under threat by oil and gas development.

Chaco Canyon and the Greater Chaco Landscape is a sacred place for tribes throughout the southwest, and along with Mesa Verda and Bears Ears, these areas are considered the “footprints of ancestors” by modern Pueblo nations.

This landscape was once home to thousands of Ancestral Puebloans and to this day is a special gathering place for tribal communities.

The BLM has already proposed oil and gas leasing in close proximity to Chaco Canyon multiple times, risking the numerous Chacoan sites that exist outside the Park’s official boundaries.

In concert with tribes and stakeholders, last week the New Mexico congressional delegation introduced legislation to permanently protect the federal lands around this sacred area, and I am proud to cosponsor and support this legislation.

It’s crystal clear that where oil and gas development occurs, robust state and federal actions are needed to protect people’s health and the places and landscapes they value.

With that, I would like to introduce our first witness, the Governor of New Mexico, the Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham.

Governor, thank you again for taking the time out of your schedule to appear before us this morning. You are recognized to testify.