



EAGLE COUNTY

Board of County Commissioners

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September 10, 2020

The Honorable Michael Bennet
United States Senate
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Senator Bennet,

As western Colorado counties, we support your efforts to protect taxpayers and our environment from the damages associated with orphaned oil and gas wells, including by sponsoring legislation to improve the federal onshore bonding program and supporting cleanup efforts.

We recognize that oil and gas development is an important part of our economy in western Colorado. However, that economic value is reduced when costs associated with cleaning up drilling sites are shifted to taxpayers and state and local governments. While our state has undertaken an effort to identify and clean up orphaned wells, the need is greater than we can address in the short-term and the current economic situation is likely to increase the scope of the problem.

On federal lands, which make up a significant portion of the state, the Government Accountability Office has documented in multiple reports that the federal onshore bonding program does not provide adequate financial assurances to prevent orphaned wells from becoming a taxpayer liability. We would like to see the current risks from orphaned wells addressed, and we cannot afford to keep adding to the problem on federal lands.

Oil and gas wells that are abandoned by companies without being fully plugged and reclaimed pose many risks to our communities and our nearby public lands. Orphaned wells can leak methane into the air, leach toxins into groundwater, harm wildlife and livestock, and impact other public lands resources and recreation opportunities. Adequate federal bonding is a necessary insurance policy for publicly owned resources and public health, both for communities situated near public lands and for the taxpayers of our state who will otherwise be left to fund cleanup. Funding restoration of orphaned wells more broadly would benefit the state's economy and environment.

Further, we have all invested in protecting lands in our counties and support your efforts in that regard as well, including through the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act. We want to make sure that oil and gas development is fully reclaimed to protect our public lands resources, such as wildlife and recreation, which contribute to our outdoor economy and to a healthy environment for our residents.

We support your efforts to propose legislative solutions to these challenging issues and to protect all taxpayers from bearing the costs to clean up oil and gas development on our public lands.

Sincerely,

Kathy Chandler-Henry

Chair

Matt Scherr

Commissioner

Jeanne McQueeney

Commissioner