

The Honorable Filemon Vela
437 Cannon House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 10, 2020

Dear Congressman Vela,

We, the undersigned, urge you to co-sponsor H.R. 4364 (Rep. Ben McAdams), H.R. 4346 (Rep. Alan Lowenthal), and H.R. 3225 (Rep. Mike Levin) to reform the leasing process for oil and gas drilling on federal lands and better protect some of America's amazing natural areas.

From family hikes amid the soaring pines of Sam Houston National Forest to birdwatching in the the LBJ National Grasslands, Texas' public lands hold something special. They preserve our state's beautiful landscapes, they protect the clean water we all depend on, and they provide a home to some of Texas' most wondrous species, like the bald eagle and the bluebird.

Unfortunately, in a state where 95% of land is privately owned, even these wild places lack protection. The Trump administration has proposed opening nearly 2 million acres of Texas' national forests and grasslands to oil and gas drilling -- an area more than twice the size of Big Bend.¹ Dirty drilling could forever damage these beautiful and unique ecosystems, polluting our drinking water, displacing wildlife, and pumping toxic chemicals into the air that we all breathe.

We need to stop the Trump administration's plan to open more public lands in Texas to oil and gas drilling. For areas already available for lease, at a minimum we must reform the federal leasing program to minimize the damage from drilling.

Our nation's oil and gas fiscal policies are outdated — some policies have not been updated in nearly a century.² Too often, oil companies are given land for next to nothing, leaving taxpayers with much of the financial burden of cleaning up any mess they make.³ Meanwhile, the public has little say in an untransparent leasing process.⁴ We urge you to co-sponsor the following bills:

- **H.R. 4364 (McAdams) to raise royalty rates:** Raises onshore royalty rates to 18.75 percent for all new onshore oil and gas leases, matching the current federal offshore

¹Krocker, C. & Glover, J. Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenario for Oil and Gas Activities. November 2018. https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd659157.pdf

² Gentile, N. Federal Oil and Gas Royalty and Revenue Reform. June 2015. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2015/06/19/115580/federal-oil-and-gas-royalty-and-revenue-reform/>

³ *ibid.*

⁴Kelly, K. Rowland-Shea, J. Gentile, N. Backroom Deals: The Hidden World of Noncompetitive Oil and Gas Leasing. May 2019. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2019/05/23/470140/backroom-deals/>

rates. The federal onshore royalty rate of 12.5 percent has not changed since 1920 and is considerably below the federal offshore royalty rate and the royalty rate Texas charges.⁵

- **H.R. 4346 (Lowenthal) to strengthen bonding requirements:** Updates federal oil and gas bonding requirements to ensure complete and timely well reclamation, as well as ending speculative leasing by prohibiting leasing on any lands with low or no development potential, allowing the BLM to manage these lands for other, better uses like wilderness, wildlife, and recreation.⁶
- **H.R. 3225 (Levin) to end noncompetitive leasing:** Ensures a competitive and transparent auction process in order to improve public participation in the leasing process.

By ensuring that the federal government responsibly oversees oil and gas drilling operations, these bills can help protect Texas' wildest places for future generations.

Sincerely,

Emma Pabst,
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Environment Texas

Trey Mendez
Mayor
City of Brownsville

Rep. Eddie Lucio, III
State Representative, District 38
Texas House of Representatives

Walter Stubbs
Rancher, Lobbyist
Cuero

Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network Health Working Group

Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network Housing Working Group

Proyecto Azteca

⁵Bush, G.P. Overview. 2015.

<https://www.glo.texas.gov/energy-business/oil-gas/mineral-leasing/overview/index.html>

⁶ Gentile, N. Federal Oil and Gas Royalty and Revenue Reform. June 2015.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2015/06/19/115580/federal-oil-and-gas-royalty-and-revenue-reform/>

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