

For immediate release:

Date: 9/22/2020

Contact:

Angel Amaya, aamaya@worc.org, (361) 779-2572

PRESS RELEASE

NEW BILL TACKLES UNEMPLOYMENT AND ABANDONED WELLS

Legislation introduced by Senator Bennet (D-CO) would create reclamation jobs for unemployed oil and gas workers while addressing the orphaned well crisis

WASHINGTON, D.C. – These days, skilled workers sit unemployed, while thousands of leaking, orphaned oil and gas wells litter the landscape of the West. An orphaned well is an unreclaimed well for which no owner or operator can be found, or where an owner or operator is unable to plug and reclaim a well. Orphaned oil and gas wells have been an issue for decades, in large part due to insufficient federal bonding requirements that have not been updated since the 1950s and the 1960s. [Senator Bennet's new legislation, *The Oil and Gas Bonding Reform and Orphaned Well Remediation Act*](#), will put thousands back to work while enacting measures to protect vital groundwater and agricultural land from continued damage. The legislation will establish an official orphaned well clean-up fund and strengthen federal oil and gas bonding requirements, creating a direct solution to the orphan well reclamation crisis that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With oil and gas demand falling dramatically during the pandemic, already over-leveraged companies are going bankrupt and leaving behind unplugged and unreclaimed wells for states and taxpayers to clean up. Thousands more oil and gas wells are being idled and are at high risk of becoming orphaned, and insufficient bond amounts make reclamation of these wells uncertain. These wells sit unplugged, emitting climate-wrecking methane and potentially contaminating groundwater until states and taxpayers are able to fund their reclamation. This legislation will ensure that the government can begin to plug and reclaim orphan wells without using taxpayer money, by eliminating nationwide blanket bonds, increasing statewide bonds and adjusting for inflation, and improving data collection to identify and catalog orphaned wells on federal, state, and tribal lands.

“For decades, unplugged wells have been allowed to pollute the land, water, and air of thousands of Westerners who live near federally managed oil and gas deposits. These same communities, who had little input in development decisions, today face widespread unemployment. Senator Bennet’s legislation will not only put these communities back to work plugging wells abandoned by industry, protect groundwater, reduce methane pollution, address the growing crisis of orphaned wells and ensure broader public participation in future

development, it also prioritizes urgently needed bonding reform,” **said Barbara Vasquez, Chair of the Oil and Gas Team for the Western Organization of Resources Councils.**

"Western Coloradans support Senator Bennet's legislation to fix the growing crisis of under-bonded oil and gas wells across the West. We still live with the unreclaimed remnants of hundreds of oil and gas facilities abandoned across our federal lands, leaving taxpayers with the clean up costs and often leaving landowners with a mess on their hands. With a new wave of bankruptcies looming, it is critical to fix federal bonding rates now to protect taxpayers and our public lands. This bill is a step towards common-sense solutions that can prevent a catastrophe." - **Steve Allerton, President, Western Colorado Alliance**

“The legislation deals with both ends of the huge and burgeoning public liabilities left by the collapsing financial bubble in America’s oil industry. It provides funds to plug and clean up the thousands of wells left behind by failed and bankrupt drillers. Most importantly, it requires that future drillers provide stronger financial assurances up front, so unfunded orphan wells don’t recur in the future.” - **Bob LeResche, Board Member, Powder River Basin Resource Council**

###

The [Western Organization of Resource Councils \(WORC\)](#) is a network of grassroots organizations that span seven Western states with more than 15,000 members. Many WORC members live on lands overlying and neighboring federal, tribal, state and privately-owned oil and gas deposits, and experience numerous impacts due to federal oil and gas production. Headquartered in Billings, Montana, WORC also has offices in Colorado and Washington, D.C.

The Powder River Basin Resource Council, founded in 1973, is a family agriculture and conservation organization in Wyoming. Resource Council members are family farmers and ranchers and concerned citizens who are committed to conservation of our unique land, mineral, water, and clean air resources.

The Western Colorado Alliance for Community Action brings people together to build grassroots power through community organizing and leadership development. We are made up of 2,000 members and supporters across Western Colorado. We believe that right now, today, we have the ability and opportunity to create a future where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just and self-reliant.