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Contact:

Angel Amaya, (361) 779-2572 [aamaya@worc.org](mailto:aamaya@worc.org)

Charisma Troiano, (202) 701-1781 [ctroiano@democracyforward.org](mailto:ctroiano@democracyforward.org)

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Group Argues for Transparency and Balance on Interior Department's Royalty Policy Committee**

*WORC seeks to halt industry-dominated Committee's unlawful operations*

**Missoula, Mont.** -- The Western Organization of Resource Council (WORC), represented by Democracy Forward Foundation, argued in federal district court today that the U.S. Department of Interior must stop convening any meetings or conducting any further business of the Royalty Policy Committee (RPC) until it balances the committee's industry-dominated membership, opens secretive subcommittee meetings, and discloses committee-members' conflicts of interests.

Absent an injunction, the groups [argue](#) that the RPC will continue to illegally shut out ranchers, landowners, taxpayers and western conservationists while allowing the secretive panel—dominated by representatives of the fossil fuel industry—to recommend royalty, leasing and permitting policies that benefit industry at the expense of public lands and public health. Previous recommendations of the RPC would streamline fossil fuel development, reducing grazing land for cattle, increasing air pollution, and impairing groundwater. In its [motion to dismiss](#) the lawsuit, the government did not dispute certain facts and injuries that would constitute violations of federal law. For example, the government did not deny that it has excluded conservation-minded viewpoints from the Committee. The government has also admitted that it has not complied with conflict of interest safeguards, arguing only that those safeguards should not apply to the RPC.

“We continue to be concerned about the Royalty Policy Committee's lopsided membership and the conflicts of interests of its members,” **said Steve Charter, rancher near Shepherd, Mont., and WORC board member.** “We don't think a handpicked group of energy industry insiders should be allowed to advise federal government policy after meeting in secret with agency staff. The public should see every document the Committee is provided and every note from all their meetings.”

“The Trump Administration is acting as though America's public resources can be bartered off to industry interests through backroom deals,” **said Travis Annatoyn, Democracy Forward Senior Counsel.** “Today, we went to court to hold the Trump Administration accountable for illegally shielding its corporate cronies from paying a fair value for the privilege of extracting from America's lands.”

The RPC's membership is dominated by representatives from industry, including ConocoPhillips, Cloud Peak Energy, Shell, Chevron, Concho Resources, Incremental Oil & Gas USA, and the National Ocean Industries Association, with no members representing public interest groups. Over the past two years, the

Committee has delegated the vast bulk of policy formulation and debate to secretive subcommittees and working groups, and has developed and considered recommendations that are harmful to the communities whose representation, as the groups allege, has been unlawfully denied.

Incarnations of the RPC have existed in prior administrations, but the Committee has not been convened in recent years. On March 29, 2017, Secretary Zinke chartered the Committee's most recent iteration, and DOI publicly announced the Committee members on April 3, 2017. The Committee met several times in 2018.

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*The [Western Organization of Resource Councils](#) (WORC) is a network of eight grassroots organizations in seven Western states with 15,000 members, many of them ranchers and farmers committed to common-sense reform in agriculture, oil and gas development, coal mine reclamation, and rural economic development. Headquartered in Billings, Mont., WORC also has offices in Colorado and Washington, D.C.*

*[Democracy Forward](#) is a nonprofit legal organization that scrutinizes Executive Branch activity across policy areas, represents clients in litigation to challenge unlawful actions, and educates the public when the White House or federal agencies break the law.*