

Opening Statement
The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva, Ranking Member
Tuesday, January 31, 2017
NRDems Forum on Protecting Methane Waste Rule From GOP Onslaught

I think it's important to be clear about the stakes here. If we protect this rule, we stop corporations from making climate change worse. If we save this rule, we reduce harmful emissions and improve public health. If we keep this rule in place, we save thousands of millions of dollars of taxpayer money every year. This isn't just about methane. This is about our well-being.

It's also about the fact that this rule took several years and many community meetings to complete, and Republicans want to undo it after a single hour of debate. If we allow that precedent to be set, what do we say when they attack a rule that prevents ivory trafficking or helps endangered species? The alternative to these rules is not some free market utopia. It's an unregulated economy that doesn't respect public health, doesn't treat the environment as a public resource, and doesn't hesitate to make a quick buck at our expense.

The numbers tell this story as well as any words could. Methane emissions from oil and gas fields have gone up 45 percent since 1990. If we choose to do nothing – which is a choice, just like putting a standard in place is a choice – that number is just going to climb higher. This rule saves enough methane from being wasted to power 740,000 homes each year. It prevents the emissions equivalent each year of about 1 million vehicles on the road.

Let's remember, those emissions aren't harmless. They include cancer-causing chemicals like benzene. They trap greenhouse gases. They increase the risk of asthma. There is no reason, especially on public land, that we should allow methane emissions to increase unchecked.

The public is with us on this. This rollback is the last thing the American people voted for. No one is out there in the heartland demanding we roll back a rule designed to protect public health and the environment. Not many people buy the Republican talking points on this. Wiping out sensible environmental rules is not good for our economy, and the public knows it. No one wants heavier methane emissions in her back yard. If Republicans had to sell this on the merits, they'd give up this fight.

But we're here because they're not trying to sell this on the merits. They're here to do a big favor for their corporate contributors, and they're doing it by obscuring what this vote is really about. They say it's not about public health, it's not about climate change – which they don't understand is real – and it's not about environmental quality. They say

it's about jobs. So let's talk about jobs. The methane control industry, which only exists because of sensible regulations like this one, has already created jobs in more than 500 locations across 46 states. That's what happens when you make room for innovation. That's what the future of our energy economy is going to look like. It's not going to look like the Wild West.

Instead of a boom-and-bust economy that relies on extracting natural resources and praying for eternally high prices, we're building an economy that respects public health, that respects nature, that respects our responsibility not to make climate change worse. This rule is necessary, and it's not going down without a fight. With that . . . [etc.etc.]