

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 3, 2018

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

For nearly two years, your administration has executed a strategy of ignoring threats to public health, abusing taxpayer resources, and undermining efforts to combat climate change. While these efforts have taken the form of multiple federal actions across many agencies, the recent proposed evisceration of methane emission controls by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will accomplish all three of these in one fell swoop. The EPA's proposal to weaken methane leak inspection and repair requirements for oil and gas operations¹ and BLM's rule gutting measures designed to reduce methane venting, flaring and leaks from oil and gas operations on public lands² will inflict tremendous harm on American citizens and on the air and water on which we all rely. We write on behalf of the communities across the country who will suffer because of these recent decisions, and to urge you to reverse course and put public health and environmental responsibility ahead of the self-serving demands of the oil and gas industry.

Weakening federal methane regulations will have real-world consequences on families and individuals who live near oil and gas operations. Oil and gas facilities leaking methane also emit volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and hazardous air pollutants such as benzene, formaldehyde, and acetaldehyde, which can exacerbate asthma and respiratory illnesses and have been linked to cancer, birth defects, and nervous system damage.³ EPA acknowledges its proposal will "degrade air quality and adversely affect health and welfare," by increasing emissions of VOCs by 100,000 tons and hazardous air pollutants by 3,800 tons.⁴ As a result of the BLM's new rule, federal regulation of methane emissions from public lands will largely revert to outdated measures that were in effect since 1979 and don't take advantage of advancements made in science, technology, and the U.S. energy industry since then. The new BLM rule will also increase emissions of VOCs by over 550,000 tons and hazardous air pollutants by over 13,000 tons between 2019 and 2025.⁵ From California to Colorado to New Mexico, oil and gas activities exist in many of our backyards, and it's clear these recent actions directly threaten the health of citizens we represent, and the citizens you have a duty to

¹ "EPA Proposes Oil and Gas Targeted Improvements Package to Advance President Trump's Energy Dominance Agenda." U.S. EPA. Sept. 11, 2018. <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-proposes-oil-and-gas-targeted-improvements-package-advance-president-trumps-energy>

² "Interior Department Finalizes New Waste Prevention Rule." U.S. BLM. Sept. 18, 2018. <https://www.blm.gov/press-release/interior-department-finalizes-new-waste-prevention-rule-0>

³ "Fossil Fumes: a public health analysis of toxic air pollution from the oil and gas industry." Clean Air Task Force. June 2016. <http://www.catf.us/resources/publications/files/FossilFumes.pdf>

⁴ "Oil and Natural Gas Sector: Emission Standards for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources Reconsideration." Proposed rule. U.S. EPA. Sept. 11, 2018. <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2018-09/documents/frnoilgasreconsideration2060-at54nprm20180910.pdf>

⁵ "Final Environmental Assessment." Bureau of Land Management. Sept. 28, 2018. <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=BLM-2018-0001-223606>

protect. Furthermore, BLM's own analysis shows that rescinding the 2016 methane rule will result in the waste of nearly \$1 billion worth of natural gas.

While you may continue to believe climate change is a hoax, destructive and costly extreme wildfires, extended heatwaves, and supercharged storms have become a new reality because of our addiction to fossil fuels. As a potent greenhouse gas (GHG) with 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide over a 20-year period, methane is a key contributor to the climate crisis, and it demands a forceful response by the federal government. Methane accounts for close to 10 percent of annual U.S. GHG emissions, and of this amount, the oil and gas industry is the largest national source.⁶ Oil and gas facilities annually emit over 8 million metric tons of methane, which is equivalent to a year's worth of pollution from 145 million cars.⁷ State officials, business leaders and countries around the world understand that steps to address climate change must involve a plan to mitigate methane emissions, but these recent EPA and BLM actions undermine these efforts and will amplify the human suffering experts forecast will occur.

As a businessman, one would hope as President you would support policies that minimize waste of a public resource like natural gas. However, repealing EPA and BLM methane regulations demonstrate your administration governs with the benefit of the oil and gas industry in mind, not American taxpayers. Between 2009 and 2015, oil and gas producers on public and Indian lands flared, vented and leaked over 460 billion cubic feet of natural gas, enough to supply over 6 million households for a year.⁸ The U.S. Government Accountability Office has determined that taxpayers are losing as much as \$23 million per year in lost royalty revenue from this wasted energy resource,⁹ and a separate independent analysis estimates that since 2013, the total value of wasted methane has exceeded \$2 billion.¹⁰ Lost royalty revenue could have been used for critical education, health, and infrastructure programs, but oil and gas companies have lobbied against EPA and BLM methane regulations by claiming compliance with the federal requirements are too costly for their struggling industry.

What makes your administration's decisions to roll back methane regulations even more disturbing and short-sighted is the fact that the government is using outdated methane emission estimates. A new scientific report from 24 authors representing 12 universities, two government labs, and more, reported that methane emissions from the U.S. oil and gas supply chain were roughly 60 percent higher than EPA inventory estimates and that emissions from production operations were more than double EPA estimates.¹¹ These revelations mean drastically more heat-trapping GHG

⁶ "Overview of Greenhouse Gases: Methane Emissions." U.S. EPA. <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/overview-greenhouse-gases>

⁷ "API's 'Environmental Partnership:' years behind the curve on methane from the oil and gas industry." Clean Air Task Force. December 2017. <http://www.catf.us/blogs/ahead/2017/12/06/apis-environmental-partnership-years-behind-the-curve-on-methane-from-the-oil-and-gas-industry/>

⁸ "Fact Sheet on Methane and Waste Prevention Rule." U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2016. https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/methane_waste_prevention_rule_factsheet.pdf

⁹ "Opportunities Exist to Capture Vented and Flared Natural Gas, Which Would Increase Royalty Payments and Reduce Greenhouse Gases." U.S. Government Accountability Office. October 2010. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/320/311826.pdf>

¹⁰ "Needless waste of American energy resources." Environmental Defense Fund. <https://www.edf.org/energy/needless-waste-american-energy-resources>

¹¹ R.A. Alvarez, et al., *Assessment of methane emissions from the U.S. oil and gas supply chain*, Science 10.1126/science.aar7204(2018).

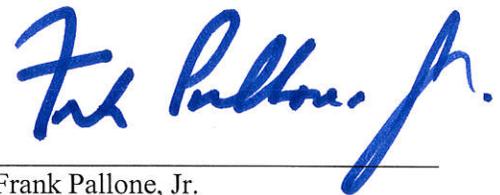
trapping GHG emissions from oil and gas facilities are polluting the atmosphere and that fossil fuel companies are wasting an even greater amount of a public resource. Furthermore, despite propaganda from the oil and gas industry claiming that its methane emissions have decreased due to voluntary actions, that decrease is due almost entirely to improvements in natural gas transmission and distribution. Methane emissions from field production, which the EPA and BLM regulations were designed to address, are up 34 percent since 1990, with the growth in methane emissions from the natural gas sector even outpacing the growth in natural gas production.¹¹

The actions by EPA and BLM will reverse critical progress made under the Obama administration to identify and reduce methane emissions from oil and gas operations across the country. In recent years, managing methane emissions from the energy sector has presented an opportunity for those interested in public health, environmental stewardship, and fiscal responsibility to work with some in the oil and gas industry to address an issue that almost all parties have identified as a problem. While your decision to abdicate federal leadership and listen to the most extreme voices in the room is far from surprising, it is nonetheless a disappointing development and one that will have immediate and long-lasting harmful impacts on our nation.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources



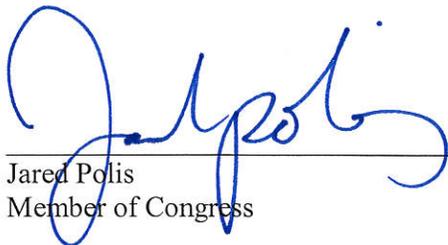
Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
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Alan Lowenthal
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Committee on Natural Resources



Diana DeGette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and
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Committee on Energy and Commerce



Jared Polis
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¹¹ U.S. EPA, *Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks, 1990-2016*.

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