

Testimony – Chris Marshall
Roundtable – “Holding Big Oil Accountable for Extortion, Collusion, and Pollution”

Thank you, Vice Ranking Member Kamlager-Dove and Members of the Committee, for the honor to speak with you today.

I’m Chris Marshall, Director of the Energy and Environment program at Accountable.US.

Accountable.US is a nonpartisan organization that shines a light on corporations and special interests that wield far too much unchecked power and influence in Washington and beyond. Our hard-hitting investigations and communications reveal who is standing in the way of a better future for everyday Americans.

The American people are fed up with corporate greed. Americans understand that greedy corporations are spoiling our environment and driving up costs that make it difficult for their families to make ends meet.

For too long, the federal government’s system of managing publicly-owned oil and gas was broken in favor of the wealthiest energy companies in the world. Some of these companies have demonstrated a willingness to cross ethical and legal lines to profit at the expense of the American public.

Before Big Oil CEOs were caught trying to fix prices with OPEC, they were called out for the unfair advantage they gained from the federal government’s program that oversees drilling of oil it manages on behalf of taxpayers.

The nonpartisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) has repeatedly rebuked the Department of the Interior and its Bureau of Land Management for failing to provide a fair return for taxpayers when public minerals are developed for private profit.

The GAO found the federal leasing program was vulnerable to waste, fraud and abuse, while severely undercharging companies to drill using a royalty rate well below what many states charge.

Accountable.US’s [2023 report](#) shows that ExxonMobil– the same company that tried to add the OPEC-colluding CEO to its board– is the largest holder of leases to drill on public lands. Our analysis showed that just a handful of Big Oil corporations profit the most from the broken leasing system while locking up hundreds of thousands of acres of public land.

What’s worse– virtually all of the top leaseholders of public lands have a record of cheating on their royalty obligations and shortchanging taxpayers. They lock up sometimes hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands through a byzantine network of subsidiaries and mergers that makes it difficult for anybody to accurately monitor their activity.

None of this happened by accident. It came to be through years of Big Oil throwing its political weight around with contributions to politicians, advocacy groups and think tanks.

The clearest and most recent example of this is the Heritage Foundation's controversial, far-right Project 2025, which aims to return us to this rigged system under a future MAGA administration. Its oil and gas provisions were written by a top Big Oil's top lobbying group, the Western Energy Alliance, which counts Exxon and other publicly traded oil giants as board members. Incidentally, the Western Energy Alliance has also taken thousands of dollars in political action committee contributions from the CEO who tried to collude with OPEC to drive up prices for American consumers.

Fortunately, the Biden-Harris administration has done a lot of work to ensure that Exxon and other Big Oil companies finally start paying their fair share. The Inflation Reduction Act and new rules at Interior bring royalty rates in line with what states charge, returning more money to rural counties to provide important services, and new bonding requirements ensure companies finally pay to clean up the messes they leave behind on our public lands.

There is still more work to do. All of the same companies that benefited from the old broken system are fighting tooth and nail to bring it back. We can't let the oil and gas industry and their right-wing mouthpieces return us to the failed policies of the past. We must put people over polluters and profiteering.

Thank you for this timely and important roundtable and for all you do for the American people.