



**MICHAEL BENNET**  
U.S. SENATOR *for* COLORADO

**Statements of Support for Senator Bennet's PEOPLE Act and The Oil and Gas Bonding Reform and Orphaned Well Remediation Act**

"The 57,000 orphaned wells that currently dot the United States pose multiple threats to the public's safety and welfare, including harming wildlife and livestock, contaminating groundwater, and emitting dangerous chemicals into the air. The restoration of these orphaned wells and modernizing federal leasing requirements for oil and gas development on federal land is key to protecting the interests of Western Colorado residents. The persistent lack of funding for properly plugging and reclaiming orphaned wells has created an unacceptable risk to the public's health, environment, and economy, and Senator Bennet's legislation poses a set of robust, common sense solutions to addressing it," **said Beth Melton, Routt County Commissioner.**

"Senator Bennet's legislation is a breath of fresh air that will introduce desperately needed accountability and transparency into the way the federal government manages oil and gas production on our federal lands. It should not be the taxpayer's responsibility to pay for the cleanup of an operator's mess, nor should local governments be left out in the cold when decisions are made about the public lands that their communities rely on for business and recreation. This is a golden opportunity to address both of these challenges by modernizing America's approach to oil and gas development on public lands," **said Tim Corrigan, Routt County Commissioner.**

"I am proud to support the reintroduction of Senator Bennet's legislation to update the federal government's financial assurance rules for oil and gas wells drilled on public lands, and bring the Bureau of Land Management's leasing practices into the 21st century. Abandoned oil and gas wells that do not have an operator to hold responsible for the cost of cleanup pose a serious threat to both our environment and the public's health, as well as a liability for American taxpayers. By strengthening bonding requirements and ensuring that the federal government is transparent and uses best practices that includes the feedback of local communities, these policies will help ensure that Colorado remains healthy, beautiful, and economically secure for generations to come," **said Lynn Padgett, Ouray County Commissioner.**

"Energy producers have a responsibility to ensure that they clean up after themselves when they drill on our public lands. Senator Bennet's legislation will require the full cost of properly plugging and reclaiming a well pad is incorporated into an appropriate bonding amount that is

necessary for the privilege; and make sure that local communities have a say when the federal government auctions leases to producers. Abandoned oil and gas wells place an unacceptable burden on American taxpayers in terms of our health, our economy, and our use and enjoyment of federal lands," **said Jonathan Houck, Gunnison County Commissioner.**

"Our way of life in Western Colorado is defined by our wide open spaces, wild lands, clean air and water, recreational opportunities and the diversity of our wildlife. Outdated federal leasing rules and insufficient financial assurances for the plugging and reclamation of oil and gas wells have resulted in air and groundwater pollution, unfair taxpayer burdens, and they have left residents and governments without an adequate voice in public lands management. Our collective future depends upon successfully reducing and mitigating fugitive methane from old and poorly managed mines and wells. Senator Bennet's legislation is an excellent opportunity to finally address these challenges, and invest in the health and economic success of Coloradans," **said Greg Poschma, Pitkin County Commissioner.**

"The federal pause on oil and gas extraction on public lands gives us an opportunity to approve much needed reasonable reform. Senator Bennet's PEOPLE ACT is a critical component of reform that would improve transparency, public comment opportunity, local government coordination and protection for surface owners. These are common sense, reasonable reform measures that would allow the industry to continue operating on public lands, while protecting public health, the environment and our local western slope economies that rely on multiple uses of our public lands," **said Hilary Cooper, San Miguel County Commissioner.**

"Eagle County is thrilled that Senator Bennet will reintroduce legislation to restore orphaned wells. These oil and gas wells that are abandoned by companies without being fully plugged and reclaimed pose many risks to communities and public lands. Although Eagle County is not home to oil and gas industry, these orphaned wells can leak methane into the air, leach toxins into groundwater, harm wildlife and livestock, and impact other public lands resources and recreation opportunities. Air and water pollution, and environmental damage, do not pay attention to county boundaries. Funding for restoration of these orphaned wells is necessary for the health of residents and the stewardship of public lands. Lack of funding adversely and unfairly impacts state taxpayers, and damages the state's economy and environment," **said Kathy Chandler-Henry, Eagle County Commissioner.**

"At a time when devastating wildfires and crippling drought have threatened the homes and livelihoods of Coloradans, it is essential for our leaders in the federal government to step up and take action to confront the sources contributing to these environmental hazards. Senator Bennet's legislation will go a long way toward addressing the crisis of orphaned oil and gas wells emitting methane into the air, and ensure that local governments and residents have a seat at the table when decisions about the public lands on which they depend are being made. I am proud to support the reintroduction of these bills," **said Jeanne McQueeney, Eagle County Commissioner.**

"The residents of Western Colorado know the value of protecting the federal lands on which we live, work, and play. The historically inadequate financial assurances and barriers to local communities having a say in how their public lands are managed has created an unmitigated crisis of harmful methane emissions and pollution of our groundwater - all while leaving taxpayers to foot the bill for clean up. Senator Bennet's legislation takes desperately needed action to address these problems by increasing the transparency of the federal leasing process, holding operators accountable for cleaning up after themselves, and modernizing the management of oil and gas development on public lands so that we may preserve them for future generations of Coloradans to come," **said Matt Scherr, Eagle County Commissioner.**

"For years and years, people in the West have watched as oil and gas companies left behind decaying infrastructure on our public lands and forced taxpayers to pay to clean up the mess with funds that could otherwise help support our communities. Senator Bennet's new legislation will right this wrong in the short and long term, creating jobs to immediately plug abandoned wells while raising federal bonds rate to ensure taxpayers aren't left footing the bill in the future, and providing the public with new opportunities to have a say in how our public lands are used. These are important bills that will restore our western way of life while protecting public lands and taxpayers, and Congress should act quickly to implement them," **said Gwen Lachelt, Director, Western Leaders Network.**

"Corporate polluters should have to clean up their messes, not the taxpayers. We applaud Senator Bennet for introducing these critical bills to shift the burden of cleanup costs for orphaned oil and gas wells away from our communities and back to the polluter. This legislation is an important first step to put our climate, communities, and public lands first -- not corporate polluters' bottom lines," **said Kelly Martin, Director of the Sierra Club's Beyond Dirty Fuels Campaign.**

"Veterans know the importance of protecting our public lands and communities. But oil and gas CEOs do not hold themselves to this same standard. For decades, oil and gas companies have left behind orphaned oil wells and aging infrastructure on our public lands, sticking taxpayers with the clean-up costs and imperiling the places that veterans served to protect. Thankfully, Senator Bennet's legislation would change the broken federal leasing system that lets oil and gas companies get away with abandoning wells on public lands and leaving us with the bill. In addition, Senator Bennet's bills will ensure the public has a say in how the lands we all own are managed. Our public lands are too essential to our nation to be threatened or put off limits by the outdated oil and gas leasing system any longer, and we applaud Senator Bennet for taking action to ensure our public lands work for the public once more," **said Kate Hoit, Western States Director, Vet Voices Foundation.**

"For far too long, wildlife habitat and communities across the state of New Mexico and the West have been forced to deal with the threats posed by orphaned oil and gas wells, including the impact of pollution on our health and wildlife habitat. Senator Bennet's important bills will bring long-awaited reforms to the broken oil and gas leasing system and ensure our public lands work for all communities. Irresponsible oil and gas development has threatened wildlife and

outdoor recreation opportunities for decades -- Congress should take this chance to build on the Biden administration's review of the leasing program and pass Senator Bennet's bills to change this dangerous and expensive status quo," **said Jesse Deubel, Executive Director, New Mexico Wildlife Federation.**

"Communities across the West rely on our iconic public lands for sustainable outdoor opportunities that support local businesses and economic growth. These opportunities are threatened by the orphaned well crisis, but Senator Bennet's bills will update the bonding rates to insure oil companies set aside sufficient funds to properly clean up wells which they have profited from for decades. These bills will create local jobs, while safeguarding clean air and water, in communities working to recruit new revenues and jobs from both visitors and businesses. But without Senator Bennett's bills, many oil field towns will have little chance of transitioning into cleaner economies," **said Ashley Korenblat, Managing Director, Public Land Solutions.**

"No one should have to breathe dirty air or drink polluted water -- but orphaned oil wells threaten our communities and the public lands our Latino families love to explore. We support Senator Bennet's legislation because it will address the growing orphaned wells crisis by both providing jobs to clean these wells up and ensuring that taxpayers are not on the hook to pay for the oil and gas industry's mess. Furthermore, we are grateful that Senator Bennet is prioritizing robust public participation so that Latino communities can be heard when oil and gas development threatens our livelihoods and the special outdoor places that matter to our families," **said Maite Arce, Founder, Hispanic Access Foundation.**

"National Parks across the west are threatened by pollution from orphaned oil and gas wells. This legislation, introduced by Senator Bennet, will help tackle this crisis and better protect our parks. Local communities know that national parks are essential to their well-being, but the outdated oil and gas program does not protect these special places. Senator Bennet's bills will help ensure the preservation of irreplaceable resources by requiring oil and gas companies to pay to clean up the wells they leave behind. We urge Congress to move swiftly to pass this legislation," **said Phil Francis, Chair, Coalition to Protect America's National Parks.**

"For years and years, people in the West have watched as oil and gas companies left behind decaying infrastructure on our public lands and forced taxpayers to pay to clean up the mess with funds that could otherwise help support our communities. Senator Bennet's new legislation will right this wrong in the short and long term, creating jobs to immediately plug abandoned wells while raising federal bonds rate to ensure taxpayers aren't left footing the bill in the future, and providing the public with new opportunities to have a say in how our public lands are used. These are important bills that will restore our western way of life while protecting public lands and taxpayers, and Congress should act quickly to implement them," **said Gwen Lachelt, Director, Western Leaders Network.**

"Senator Bennet's bills introduced today are welcomed by rural Westerners who live near oil and gas drilling. For almost a century, lax rules have allowed companies to leave behind leaking

and destructive orphaned wells on public and private lands. A nationwide cleanup plan will protect farmlands, create jobs, and prevent continued pollution. These bills also give local residents in the oil patch a stronger voice in when and how development proceeds and ensure corporations will clean up after themselves, creating thousands of well-paying jobs in the process," **said Barbara Vasquez, leader with the Western Organization of Resource Councils, from Cowdrey, Colorado.**

"We applaud Senator Bennet's reintroduction of both the Oil and Gas Bonding Reform and Orphaned Well Remediation Act and the Public Engagement Opportunity on Public Lands Exploration (PEOPLE) Act. Together, these important pieces of legislation protect communities from the harmful impacts of abandoned wells on public lands, and protect their rights to participate in public lands management decisions no matter who's in the White House. These communities deserve to weigh in on any decisions related to extraction on the public lands that belong to all of us, and though the harm imposed by the previous administration's cutting down of the public participation process can never be undone, Senator Bennet's bills present a meaningful next step following DOI's reinstatement of adequate public comment and protest periods and ahead of the Department's review of the federal oil and gas leasing program," **said Lauren Pagel, Policy Director, Earthworks.**

"The antiquated oil and gas leasing system has not recognized the true value of our public lands for decades; instead, it rewards oil and gas CEOs while risking the public's participation in the decision-making process. This skewed leasing system lets orphaned oil wells pose a danger to our air, land, and water, letting oil and gas companies off the hook for their clean-up costs and pollution. Senator Bennet is working to fix this problem by updating decades-old bonding rates and putting people back to work to clean up these wells, making our public lands safer for people and wildlife. Congress must finally bring this system into the 21st century by passing Senator Bennet's bills," **said Russell Kuhlman, Executive Director, Nevada Wildlife Federation.**

"Many Hispanics participate in outdoor traditions passed down through generations-- practices that rely on healthy waterways, clean air, and rich wildlife habitats. Our broken federal oil and gas leasing system puts all of this at stake, and it is time to do something about it. Senator Bennet has introduced two important bills to reform this system and hold companies accountable for cleaning up their mess while ensuring community input is heard. Coupled with the Biden administration's pause on new leases, these reforms will help fix the leasing system so that it works better for all of us," **said Camilla Simon, Executive Director, Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO).**

"Latinos across the West want their leaders to protect their public lands, listen to their input on public lands management decisions, and hold oil and gas companies accountable for cleaning up their mess. We are thankful that Senator Bennet has introduced important and badly-needed legislation to reform the broken oil and gas leasing system so that it works for our communities. His bills will provide jobs, protect our land, air, and water with increased reclamation bonding rates, and ensure that robust public participation is a priority, not just a box to be checked," **said Ean Tomas Tafoya, Colorado Field Advocate, Green Latinos.**

“All communities, regardless of zip code, should have access to clean water and have their voices heard by decision makers. But for too long, the federal oil and gas leasing program has put the interests of oil and gas executives above the needs of our people, shutting us out of the decision-making process while leaving us to clean up the mess Big Oil leaves behind on our public lands.. Senator Bennet’s new bills recognizes just how intertwined our public lands and the environment are with issues centered around justice, race, and equity. Tackling the orphaned well crisis now, and updating bonding rates to hold oil and gas companies accountable for cleaning up their messes in the future, ensures that this system works better for our health, our lands, and our connection with nature,” **said Nuestra Tierra, Ángel Peña, Executive Director.**

"Across Western Colorado, we see the remains of hundreds of oil and gas facilities that have been abandoned on our public lands, many still polluting our air, land and water. To make matters worse, taxpayers -- not the oil and gas companies who left the wells behind -- could have to pay for cleanup. Senator Bennet’s legislation will put Western Colorado on a path to solving this problem now while also providing the tools to ensure it is not repeated in the future. The federal leasing program has not worked for our communities for quite some time, but with these significant Bennet Bill improvements to the federal bonding requirements, future generations will be able to enjoy our public lands without the obsolete oil and gas production equipment and associated pollution," **said Rodger Steen, WCA's Oil and Gas Committee Chairman, Western Colorado Alliance.**

“For years, Coloradans and communities across the West have called for modern oil and gas policies that protect our communities and iconic public lands. Today, Senator Bennet heeded those calls by introducing two new bills to hold oil and gas companies accountable for cleaning up the messes they leave in our communities, and safeguard the public’s right to have a say in how our public lands are managed. We applaud Senator Bennet for his leadership and look forward to working with the rest of Congress and the Biden administration as they identify solutions to make the federal oil and gas leasing system work for everyone,” **said Sara Loflin, Executive Director, League of Oil and Gas Impacted Coloradans.**

“The bills Senator Bennet introduced today protect Coloradans from a federal oil and gas leasing program that, for too long, has prioritized the desires of oil and gas executives over everything and everyone else. By updating bonding rates to account for the full cost of reclaiming oil and gas wells, his legislation will tackle a growing crisis while protecting Coloradans having to pay to clean up after oil and gas companies. Furthermore, his legislation will ensure that Coloradans living near oil and gas development will have proper consultation in federal land management decisions. As the Biden administration reviews the federal leasing program, Senator Bennet’s bills provide a helpful roadmap for how our federal public lands can be managed in a fiscally responsible manner,” **said Pegah Jalali, Environmental Policy Analyst, The Colorado Fiscal Institute.**

“Senator Bennet’s bill is all about fairness. Who should pay for cleaning up the hundreds of orphaned oil and gas wells that threaten the health of New Mexicans – the companies that profited from them or the public? Defunct oil and gas producers have littered New Mexico with orphaned wells while taxpayers are forced to foot the bill to clean them up. Those critical funds could be spent supporting our children and schools instead of cleaning up the mess oil and gas companies have left behind. To make matters worse, federal barriers to public participation in land management decisions have put the oil and gas executives ahead of everyone else. It’s important that we all have a say in how our lands are used and managed, because the public is loud and clear that we should not have to pay to clean up the oil industry’s orphaned wells. We are thankful that Senator Bennet has introduced two bills to fix these problems and put our children and public lands first,” **said James Jimenez, Executive Director, New Mexico Voices for Children.**

“From outdated bonding rates that fail to hold oil and gas companies accountable for orphaning their wells to a public participation process that all too often silences our communities, the federal oil and gas leasing program is in dire need of reform. Luckily, Senator Bennet just introduced two bills to ensure rural and farming communities across the Rocky Mountain region are not saddled with the costs of cleaning up after oil and gas companies and that we can have our voices heard in decisions made about how our public lands are used and managed. These bills -- combined with the Biden administration’s review of the program -- are a fantastic step in the right direction. We look forward to working with Senator Bennet and his colleagues to ensure these vital steps are taken to stand up for farmers and rural communities,” **said Dale McCall, President, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union.**

“Paying to clean up your mess should be a basic tenet of doing business in the oil and gas industry, rather than leaving reclamation needs unaddressed, or letting taxpayer dollars be used to clean up well sites. Therefore, federal investment in cleaning up orphan wells must also address the outdated bonding rules that have helped to create the orphan well crisis, and left unplugged wells polluting our air, water, and communities nationwide. Senator Bennet’s reintroduced Oil and Gas Bonding Reform and Orphaned Well Remediation Act and Public Engagement Opportunity on Public Lands Exploration Act will help hold polluters accountable for the damage they cause, by strengthening bonding federal requirements for the first time in decades, and ensure that people have a say in the land management decisions that impact them,” **said Sara Cawley, Legislative Representative, Earthjustice.**

“You can’t drill and dash! It’s long overdue for fossil fuel companies to start picking up the tab for their own mess. Senator Bennet’s bill helps ensure that fossil fuel corporations — not taxpayers — will be held accountable for cleaning up and plugging old oil and gas wells that continue to poison our air, water, and land. Addressing the looming crisis of cleaning up the thousands of old leaking wells will make our communities safer and healthier while also creating hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs,” **said Ben Smith, Senior Climate Campaigner, Greenpeace USA.**

“Communities deserve to have a say in what happens on public lands and to know that they won’t be left to clean up a mess left by oil and gas companies. For decades, orphaned oil and gas wells have not only left communities with the clean-up, but also with the hazards of chemicals leaking into their air and drinking water. Senator Bennet’s bills would not only work to clean up the nation’s toxic orphan well crisis but also ensure that oil and gas companies, not taxpayers, are responsible for future clean-ups, while also ensuring that communities across Colorado and the nation will have a voice in the management of public lands for the future,” **said The Wilderness Society’s Colorado Director, Jim Ramey.**