

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

6/18/2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy,

As you continue to consider opportunities to support the recovery of the economy and put Americans back to work in the aftermath of the current COVID-19 pandemic, we respectfully request that you provide funding for the plugging and reclamation of orphan oil and gas wells. Orphan wells are unplugged, abandoned wells for which the operator is unknown or insolvent. This critical funding for states and tribes would create jobs for many who have lost their employment in recent months due to the crash in oil and gas demand, while simultaneously supporting urgent environmental restoration.

According to recent studies, there are an estimated 3 million abandoned oil and gas wells throughout the United States¹. In Pennsylvania alone these wells emit 40,000 to 70,000 metric tons of methane gas per year or about 5 to 8 percent of the state's human-caused methane emissions². Abandoned wells may also contaminate ground water, degrade local air quality, and present a safety hazard.

In recent months, our nation has weathered a crash in the price of oil and gas caused by a price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia; and reduced consumption as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. This situation has resulted in domestic producers idling their wells and, in some cases, abandoning their operations. Along with the environmental impacts of abandonment, this situation has created new economic suffering throughout the industry, especially for small rural producers which historically operate on tight profit margins and oil and gas workers who have lost their jobs. Given these dual economic and environmental challenges, we strongly believe this matter must be addressed in future legislation focused on the recovery of our nation.

The major oil and gas producing states across the country are interested in putting people back to work to clean up these sites. According to some estimates, \$2 Billion is needed to address the approximately 57,000 orphan wells that are documented on federal, state, tribal, and private lands. Officials from many of these states indicate they do not have the funds to plug and reclaim existing orphan wells, especially during this extremely difficult time. Congress should respond to

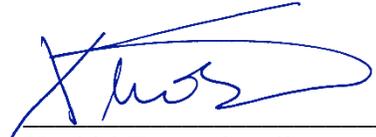
1 Brandt AR, et al. "Methane leaks from North American natural gas systems." *Science* 343(6172):733-735, (2014) Energy and environment.

2 Kang, Mary, et al. "Direct measurements of methane emissions from abandoned oil and gas wells in Pennsylvania." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Dec. 2014, 111 (51) 18173-18177; DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1408315111. <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/111/51/18173.full.pdf>

this challenge with strong funding for states and tribes to help address the current backlog of orphan wells, put thousands back to work, and clean up our environment.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Xochitl Torres Small
Member of Congress



Glenn 'GT' Thompson
Member of Congress



Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress



Mike Kelly
Member of Congress

Additional Signatories:

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