

U.S. Rep Yvette Herrell calls for New Mexico to oppose Biden's oil and gas policies

U.S. Rep. Yvette Herrell (R-NM), New Mexico's only Republican in Congress, continued in the charge against energy policies enacted by President Joe Biden's administration which Herrell said threatened her home state more than most in the U.S.

Herrell joined a forum held Friday by Republican members of the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources which pointed to purported negative impacts of Biden's policies on state economies and America's oil and gas industry.

Upon taking office, Biden via executive order placed a temporary pause on new federal oil and gas land leases, while calling on the Interior Department to review its federal energy policies.

Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, who previously represented New Mexico's First Congressional District in the House, sought through secretarial orders to reverse federal multiple federal policies from the administration of former-President Donald Trump that aimed to increase fossil fuel drilling and open up more public land to such development.

Most recently, Haaland also created a Climate Task Force to focus on reducing carbon pollution created by oil and gas.

But in New Mexico's oil-rich Second Congressional District Yvette Herrell represents in southern New Mexico, the first-term Congresswoman argued the federal administration's policies could devastate local communities and the American energy industry.

More than half of New Mexico's oil production occurs on federal land subject to Biden's policies, mostly in the Permian Basin in the southeast corner of the state within Herrell's district, and the state depends on oil and gas for more than a third of its budget.

Herrell said her state was impacted disproportionately by the orders.

"New Mexico is unique in that so much of our production comes from federal lands, both in oil and gas," Herrell said. "So, we're really hit."

Jim Winchester, executive director of the Independent Petroleum Association of New Mexico said during the forum that Congress people and New Mexico's state leaders should push the Biden administration to consider the unique effects the orders had on New Mexico.

He pointed to such letters written to Biden and Haaland from New Mexico's Democrat Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and members of her cabinet arguing the pause on federal leasing and other actions already meant oil and gas companies had left the state of neighboring Texas where most oil and gas land is private and not subject to federal policy.

Sharing stories of workers and local communities that rely on oil and gas, he said, was the best way to get the message out that Biden's policies should be reversed.

"Your district is down there in Roswell and other areas and they get it," Winchester said to Herrell. "They know how important it is for oil and gas to support the local economy. By targeting them, we'll get the stories that we need to get out there."

Cities like Carlsbad, Hobbs and others in the Permian Basin region could be devastated by Biden's policies, Herrell said, and she intended to bring awareness to such plight.

“I think that messaging is going to be what’s going to be most effective,” Herrell said. “I believe we’ve talked so much over the years as numbers and jobs. Now, we’ve gotta go after the emotional side. The heart and soul of those who are pushing against us.

“I hope the whole country is picking up on this, and hearing what we’re saying.”

In a letter to New Mexico State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard, Herrell argued the pause on federal leasing could also affect oil and gas operations on State Trust lands managed by Garcia Richard’s office which often occur adjacent to activities on federal land.

She called on Garcia Richard, a Democrat, to join the opposition to Biden’s actions.

“New Mexico, like many other Western states, is a checkerboard of state, federal, tribal and private lands,” Herrell wrote. “That equilibrium has now been damaged by the ban on new leases on federal lands. An attack on the oil and gas industry is an attack on the future economic sustainability of our state and future of our children.”

In her response, Garcia Richard called New Mexico’s reliance on oil and gas a “short-sighted budgeting mechanism,” arguing the state needed to diversify its economy away from the “finite resource” of oil and gas.

Garcia Richard reported that only 2 percent of State Trust land was still available for lease, and she voiced concern that fossil fuel market fluctuations such as the recent downturn amid the COVID-19 pandemic could spell continued economic hardship for New Mexico if it continued to rely on oil and gas.

“Since taking office in January 2019, I have been laser-focused on diversifying the revenue streams coming into the State Land Office from leasing state trust land. I have done so, because, as you state in your letter, roughly 40 percent of

our general fund comes from oil and gas production,” Garcia Richard wrote to Herrell.

“This is a fact that keeps me up at night and keeps me working to diversify activity on state trust land as quickly as possible to avoid budget strain when the industry next falters.”