

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**HOUSE REPUBLICAN MEMBERS SEND LETTER TO STATE LAND COMMISSIONER  
STEPHANIE GARCIA RICHARDS OPPOSING OIL AND NATURAL GAS DEVELOPMENT LEASE  
MORATORIUM**

SANTA FE, NM— Four Republican members of the New Mexico House of Representatives who sit on the House Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Committee today sent a letter to State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richards expressing their strong opposition to a recent announcement that the State Land Office was placing an indefinite hold on new lease sales of the state's "best tracts" of trust land for oil and natural gas development. This moratorium on new lease sales, according to Commissioner Garcia Richards, is due to the failure of the Legislature to enact HB 48 during the recent session that would have increased the state's oil and natural gas royalty rate from 20 percent to 25 percent. State Representatives Jim Townsend (R- Artesia), Larry Scott (R-Hobbs), Rod Montoya (R-Farmington), and Jared Hembree (R-Roswell) called this lease sale moratorium unacceptable as the commissioner is placing her personal political agenda ahead of the needs of schools, hospitals, universities and other public institutions who receive a portion of the revenues generated by these lease sales.

"It is a dereliction of Commissioner Garcia Richards' fiduciary responsibility to withhold these lease sales and cause worthy and essential public institutions to lose millions of dollars in operating funds simply because she did not get what she wanted from the Legislature," said Rep. Townsend. Rep. Scott added, "Commissioner Garcia Richards seems to think that it's now her job to overrule a decision made by the Legislature not to increase the royalty rate, plus she has inserted unnecessarily politics into the trust land leasing process that should always be conducted in a nonpartisan manner."

"Not only are millions of dollars of lease revenues going to be lost due to the commissioner's action, but she has opened the door to potential unintended consequences that could reduce future lease bids for these "best tracts" which could have a negative effect on workers and local communities who depend upon oil and natural gas exploration for their economic well-being," stated Rep. Montoya. Rep. Hembree continued by saying, "Commissioner Garcia Richards must realize it is essential for the State Land Office to manage these trust lands in the best interest of all New Mexicans, and this lease moratorium is no way to get the Legislature to change its reluctance to increase this royalty rate."

The letter calls on Commissioner Garcia Richards to reverse this ill-advised decision to ensure that no area of New Mexico or any public institution is punished because of her failure to

convince the Legislature that a royalty increase is necessary. The commissioner has advanced this royalty increase proposal numerous times since 2019, and each time legislators have rejected it.

A copy of the letter to the State Land Office is attached to this press release.

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