

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

March 24, 2023

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We write regarding an inquiry we sent to the Department of the Interior (DOI) on January 12, 2022, for which we are still awaiting a response. The lack of transparency from DOI on this information request is completely unacceptable. The Department's refusal to reply is especially egregious given the impact that your policies have had on discouraging investment in, and restricting access to, energy production on federal lands and waters, even while Americans suffer from soaring energy costs and rampant inflation. In fact, home heating bills this winter were the most expensive they've been in 25 years,¹ food prices are up 10.9% from last year,² gas prices last Thanksgiving were the highest ever,³ and nearly 34% of American households reduced or skipped basic expenses to pay energy bills from the summer of 2021 to the summer of 2022.⁴ As a former Member of the House Committee on Natural Resources who co-signed myriad letters requesting information from DOI, we trust that you appreciate Congress' role in ensuring the transparency of federal agencies – a responsibility that is paramount to maintaining the public trust in America's democratic process and political institutions.

In concurrence with the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) vision to “enhance the quality of life for all citizens,”⁵ we ask that you fulfill your legal obligations. By resuming statutorily mandated quarterly lease sales and approving drilling permits, or Applications for Permit to Drill (APDs), within 30 days as required by law, DOI can make energy affordable and reliable for the Americans you serve.

Complying with the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 and holding quarterly lease sales for energy development on federal lands is of national importance and the effects are felt strongly at the state, local, and international level. Lease sales provide not only new sources of federal royalties, but also bonus bids and rental fees that are a major source of revenue to energy-producing states. States then use these energy revenues for public services, supporting everything from public schools to firefighters. Ensuring access to our valuable resources solidifies our nation's position

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-home-heating-bills-expected-surge-this-winter-eia-2022-10-12/>

² <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/cpi.nr0.htm>

³ <https://www.gasbuddy.com/go/thanksgiving-gas-prices-2022>

⁴ <https://www.lendingtree.com/personal/energy-bills-study/>

⁵ <https://www.blm.gov/about/our-mission>

as a global energy leader, while also reducing our dependence on foreign actors who have no concern for the best interests of American citizens.

Despite a statutory requirement to have held eight onshore oil and gas lease sales in each eligible state by this point in the Biden administration, under your tenure DOI has only conducted one. What's more, the singular sale was largely diluted as BLM only offered 20 percent of the parcels that were originally included and implemented a 50 percent royalty hike.⁶ As a result, only 110 square miles of the 200 square miles offered were bid on.⁷ The Biden administration has leased fewer acres for oil and gas production offshore and on federal land than any presidential administration since the end of World War II.⁸ The lack of leasing has reduced investment in domestic oil and gas development, limited American energy production, and caused oil and gasoline prices to skyrocket above the \$2.39 per gallon they were when President Biden took office.⁹ To make matters worse, the Department's lack of leasing will likely have a larger long-term impact that will endure for decades as producers run out of producible acreage.

The BLM approved an average of 233 drilling permits per month in FY 2022. In contrast, DOI was approving nearly 400 drilling permits monthly in FY 2020 under then-President Donald Trump.¹⁰ As of January 31, 2023, a total of 5,075 APDs were still pending awaiting BLM approval. Approving APDs will increase near-term energy production, which will increase domestic energy supply and ultimately drive down energy prices for all Americans, a goal I am hopeful we all share.

We realize you are following a false narrative from this administration that you are somehow saving the world from climate destruction by stonewalling US energy production. Because of your mismanagement of our federal lands and resources, you are doing more damage to the climate and our environment by creating market conditions that incentivize the world's worst polluters to produce more and have that energy shipped across the globe rather than using domestic energy sources which could supply our needs while creating American jobs and economic growth. This is unacceptable and we are demanding that you follow the law and do your congressionally mandated job for the sake of the economy and the environment.

We highlight these statistics to fulfill our promise to the American people to conduct adequate oversight. As such, we are resubmitting and updating our request for information on these important topics. We originally asked for most of this information by January 27, 2022, therefore we ask that you produce the following by April 14, 2023:

1. All documents and communications describing the approval process of APDs, lease extensions, and suspensions, including, but not limited to, a description of when actions

⁶ <https://www.energyindepth.org/first-biden-administration-onshore-lease-sales-bring-in-nearly-22-million/>

⁷ <https://apnews.com/article/biden-billings-climate-and-environment-government-politics-e2d9bb381672f26ea985c65407c728ae>

⁸ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/federal-oil-leases-slow-to-a-trickle-under-biden-11662230816>

⁹ <https://nypost.com/2022/06/06/gas-prices-have-doubled-since-biden-took-office/>

¹⁰ <https://www.blm.gov/programs/energy-and-minerals/oil-and-gas/operations-and-production/permitting/applications-permits-drill>

are elevated to DOI headquarters in Washington, D.C., for final approval and the approval discretion that is granted to BLM field offices.

2. All documents and communications regarding how many APDs, lease extensions, and suspensions have been elevated to headquarters since February 1, 2021 and all surnames – for both appointees and career employees – in the surname chain who have reviewed and/or approved permit documents or any documents related to permit approval since February 1, 2021.
3. Documents sufficient to show the current status, as of March 24, 2023, of pending APDs in each BLM state office and the number of APDs approved per month by each BLM state office from January 1, 2016 to present. We request that this information be put online for the benefit of the American people in the template used by the BLM as of December 2020.
4. Documents sufficient to show the average amount of time it takes each BLM field office to issue an APD from the time the completed application was submitted to the time the completed application was approved.
5. All documents and communications describing the status of grant relief approvals required under Section 39 of the Mineral Leasing Act, which provides for BLM to grant relief to existing lessees in the form of a suspension of operations and production (SOP) when adjacent federal lands which are available for leasing per the Overall Area Leasing EIS are not offered for lease. We also request that this document indicate how many SOP requests have been denied since February 1, 2021.
6. All documents and communications regarding the status of nominated parcels for future onshore lease sales. This includes, but is not limited to, the number of expressions of interest that BLM has not taken any action to review, the number of expressions of interest that BLM has not yet completed review for, the number of expressions of interest that BLM has completed review for but has not offered, the number of potential lease sales to date, and the length of time any expressions of interest have been pending.
7. All documents and communications regarding BLM's plan to execute quarterly lease sales to comply with the Mineral Leasing Act following the announcement on October 29, 2021, that environmental assessments of future lease sales must consider cumulative and social costs of emissions, and whether and to what extent this new requirement has resulted in delayed or postponed lease sales. Additionally, we would like the Department to explain what statute allows for the consideration of the cumulative and social costs of emissions and how many APDs have been held up as a result of this political decision.
8. All documents and communications showing the total amount of taxpayer funds utilized to date by the Department to appeal the injunction on the oil and gas leasing moratorium imposed by Executive Order 14008.

9. All documents and considerations describing the administration's plans to provide monetary relief to compensate energy-producing states for lost receipts from bonus bids from January 20, 2021, to present.
10. All documents and communications describing the number of leases or APDs impacted by any preliminary injunction that includes the state in which the leases or permits are located, the number of acres or number of permits impacted, and the status of the lawsuit and the plaintiffs involved.
11. All documents and communications describing the acreage offered per year from January 1, 2016, to present, as a part of lease sales under the Mineral Leasing Act, the acres receiving bids for each of those years and the current amount of acres that are eligible for leasing.
12. All documents and communications regarding the amount of money received by each BLM state office per month from bonus bids, permitting fees, rental fees, and royalties from oil and gas development on federal lands from January 1, 2016, to present.
13. All documents and communications regarding the current status as of March 24, 2023, of pending permits for gathering lines in each BLM state office and the number of gathering line permits approved per month by each BLM state office from January 1, 2016 to present. We request that this information be put online for the benefit of the American people.
14. All documents and communications regarding the number of APD extension and lease extension requests that were not granted to operators with details on why they were requested and why they were denied.
15. All documents and communications regarding the percentage of personnel responsible for oil and gas leasing and permitting that are currently back in person in each district or field office on a full-time basis and the percentage of personnel that were physically coming into each office per month, and how often, from January 1, 2016, to present.
16. A directory of all oil and gas leasing and permitting employees within each BLM field office, with contact information, to be shared with the Committee and made publicly available on the BLM's website. If a directory is not already available, then produce documents sufficient to show all oil and gas leasing and permitting employees within each BLM field office, with contact information.
17. Documents sufficient to show the amount of time on average that it takes the BLM and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to fill staffing vacancies for oil and gas permitting and an explanation of the necessary steps required in the hiring process for such positions.
18. Documents sufficient to show all federal oil and gas related legal settlements DOI is currently negotiating or has completed since February 1, 2021.

19. BLM officials have stated that they will count, for purposes of meeting the requirements of the so-called Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), acreage they initially consider for a lease sale even if they end up deferring that acreage and not actually offering it on the day of the sale. Please describe why the BLM believes this interpretation is compliant with the IRA, which mandates that the sum total of acres offered for lease in an onshore lease sale be at least 2 million acres or “50 percent of the acreage for which expressions of interest have been submitted.”
20. All documents and communications, including, but not limited to, internal memos related to DOI compliance with the oil and gas leasing provisions in the IRA.

Please contact the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Majority staff at (202) 226-3044 or Ashley.Nichols@mail.house.gov with any questions about this request and to coordinate the delivery of your response to room 1324-A of the Longworth House Office Building.

An attachment contains additional instructions for responding to this request. This matter is critically important to energy-producing states across the country and the American economy as a whole. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to a timely response.

Sincerely,



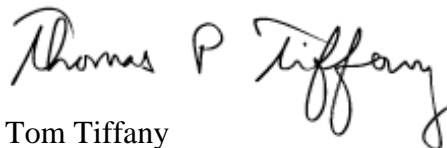
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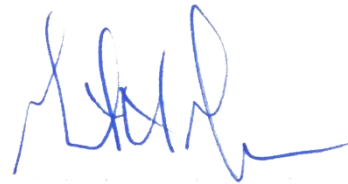
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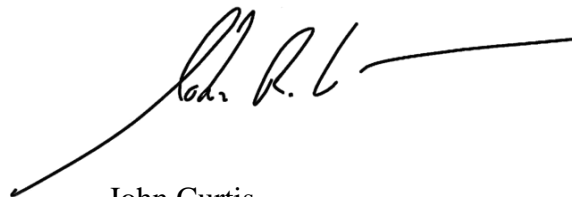
Daniel Webster
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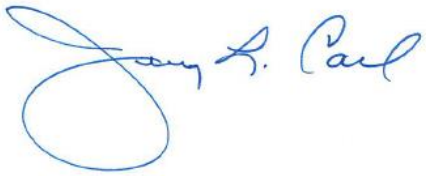
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