

Dear Friends:

Following up on the DOI press release of March 18, 2021, the following are my ideas to help inform Interior's interim report.

For the U.S. to accomplish its climate objectives, it must advance an energy vision that addresses climate change while ensuring economic prosperity. This vision must be based on a hybrid energy approach incorporating energy sources such as natural gas.

[Executive orders](#) emerging from the Administration include provisions for a "carbon pollution-free energy sector" by 2035. The Department of Interior's comprehensive review of the federal oil and gas program is critical " ...to improve stewardship of public lands and waters, create jobs, and build a just and equitable energy future."

Here are four recommendations that could guide the interim report that the Department of Interior will produce later this summer.

First, acknowledge that natural gas is a cleaner alternative to coal in the short to medium term. The historical shift from coal to natural gas in the electric power sector has been a game-changer. The U.S. is a leader in curbing greenhouse gas emissions to prevent climate change, [cutting](#) energy-related CO₂ emissions. In fact, [the Energy Information Administration recently found](#) that "U.S. electric power sector emissions have fallen 33% from their peak in 2007 because less electricity has been generated from coal and more electricity has been generated from natural gas." Market forces did that. It is why the Biden administration should keep its eye on a process for decarbonization rather than trying to ban fossil fuel production. Working with private-sector energy partners is necessary to encourage markets to continue this trend in the future while protecting public lands and waters

These market forces are also responsible for renewable energy's increasing share of electric power generation. A recent report by the Progressive Policy Institute [concludes](#) that natural gas plays an indispensable role in meeting climate goals and supporting renewable energy expansion. Achieving a clean energy target by 2035 is feasible if the new energy and climate team embraces natural gas's advantages as a transition fuel in a hybrid energy system. Otherwise, they risk setting back hard-fought efforts to lower greenhouse gas emissions over the last decade.

Second, the Biden energy team should review the idea of [banning](#) federal leasing. More than [5 million](#) parcels of federal land were leased to oil and gas companies in recent years. These leases represent just a portion of the roughly 700 million acres overseen by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In 2019, oil and gas activity on BLM-managed land generated \$75.8 billion in economic output and supported more than 300,000 jobs.

The jobs and revenue generated from this policy are substantial economic benefits that states need in this current economic climate. Indeed, [according](#) to Interior's Office of Natural

Resources Revenue, 34 states could lose such benefits, including Wyoming, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Montana, North Dakota, California, and Alaska.

Now is the time to scrutinize the policy regarding the leasing of federal lands. This review must consider a critical facet of the leasing program: the impact a leasing ban on gas would have on coal consumption. An American Petroleum Institute analysis [found](#) that a leasing ban would increase U.S. coal use by 15% by 2030. Any action regarding leasing must be a step forward for the American economy and climate action that reduces coal demand.

Third, Biden officials must encourage the U.S. energy sector to support [the American Jobs Plan](#) that the Administration recently announced. Fixing America's infrastructure, rejuvenating its electric grid, and revitalized manufacturing now require energy now. Not all of that will be clean energy. Not only must that energy support the electrical power sector but the manufacturing and industrial sectors as well. Until U.S. businesses can develop alternatives, [carbon-based inputs](#) will be required to produce the asphalt, cement, steel, and other metals necessary for infrastructure renewal and short-term job creation.

Fourth, natural gas is necessary to tackle the climate crisis abroad. According to [Reuters' reporting](#), while US CO2 emissions dropped .6% in 2019, average emissions in developing countries increased 2.5%, primarily due to coal-fired power generation. A critical [study](#) recently found that using American LNG rather than coal for electricity generation in China, India, and other countries would produce about 50% fewer greenhouse gas emissions. The world is [unlikely to see](#) the Biden administration actively hawk U.S. LNG overseas as former President Trump did. Nevertheless, promoting U.S. gas exports through diplomacy and trade initiatives should be a critical part of U.S international energy and climate policy.

This interim report will be critical to determining the future of U.S. climate and energy policy.

I hope these suggestions help that process.

Sincerely,

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