

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 21, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

We are writing to call for the cancellation of hundreds of oil and gas leases across Utah that threaten our climate and, if developed, will further exacerbate the impacts of climate change. Due to successful litigation and administrative appeals, the Utah-Bureau of Land Management has been forced to reconsider decisions on more than five hundred leases, covering more than 700,000 acres of public lands in Utah.¹ We urge you to outright cancel these leases.

Fossil fuel leasing and development on public lands managed by the Department of the Interior is a primary contributor to climate change. In a recent report, the United States Geological Service concluded that the development and combustion of fossil fuels extracted from public lands account for nearly twenty-four percent of the nation's annual carbon dioxide emissions.

The leasing and development of Bureau-managed minerals is the primary source of the Interior Department's significant greenhouse gas emissions. The development of the oil and gas leases in Utah currently under review by the Bureau will, by the agency's own estimate, contribute significant amounts of new climate change-driving emissions. Confronted with the climate crises, the significant amount of greenhouse gas emissions that will result from development on these leases is unacceptable.

The more than five hundred leases being reconsidered by the Bureau are located in some of the nation's most wild, scenic, and culturally rich areas. Hundreds of them encompass Bureau-identified lands with wilderness characteristics proposed for wilderness designation in S. 3056, *America's Red Rock Wilderness Act*. Due to the significant threat these leases pose to our climate and wild places, we ask you to cancel them and to reject the proposed development in the Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness.

One lease (UTU-93713) deserves particular mention because it is within Congressionally designated Wilderness: the Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness area. The Bureau issued this lease without allowing for public participation and without preparing analysis required by the National Environmental Policy Act. Federal courts have held that such actions violate the law.

¹ This project is available on the Bureau's ePlanning website at: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2002778/510>.

The Bureau rushed to issue this lease in February 2019 with full knowledge that the public lands it encompassed were set to be designated as Wilderness in the *John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act*, which was signed into law on March 12, 2019. This historic, bipartisan law created 1.3 million acres of Wilderness across the nation, including the Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness. It also added the Green River, which flows through Labyrinth Canyon, to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This remote stretch of desert river is one of the most famous in our nation due to its solitude, rich cultural history, and unmatched scenic beauty—values enjoyed by thousands of Americans every year. The proposed development will destroy Congress sought to protect when it created the Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness.

These oil leases threaten environmentally sensitive and culturally rich lands throughout Utah that Congress has worked to protect. Given the significance of these lands, we request that you cancel these leases. Thank you for considering our request.

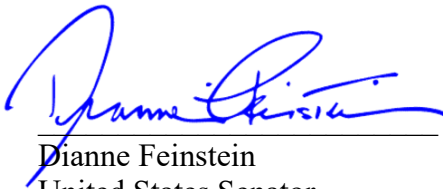
Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Jeffery A. Merkley
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator