

Congresswoman for District Three celebrates Infrastructure Act signing

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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Prepares for action on orphaned wells

Staff Reports

New Mexico's District Three Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández, D-N.M had a checklist of reasons to smile when President Joseph Biden signed the Infrastructure Act Nov. 15.

As Chair of the Subcommittee on Indigenous People, Leger Fernández advocated for investments to make broadband accessible and affordable for low-income and rural households, funding for water infrastructure projects, including the Navajo Gallup Water Supply Project, tribal funding and \$4.7 billion to plug orphaned wells.

Leger Fernández introduced the Orphaned Wells Cleanup and Jobs Act of 2021 in April to clean up over 56,000 known "orphaned" oil and gas wells across the country that were leaking methane and contaminating groundwater.

"Fossil fuel companies abandoned hundreds of thousands of oil and gas wells; they abandoned their duty to clean up after themselves," Leger Fernández said. "These orphaned wells leak methane, one of the most potent greenhouse gases, and other pollutants.

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“Their leaks into the air and groundwater pose serious public health risks, especially to rural, Tribal, and communities of color,” she said. “When we clean them up, we create good paying jobs and reinvest in the communities abandoned by these fossil fuel companies.

The Orphan Wells Cleanup and Jobs Act:

Authorizes \$7.25 billion in grant funding for orphaned well cleanup on state and private lands, \$400 million for cleanup on public lands, and \$300 million for cleanup on Tribal lands.

Strengthens regulatory safeguards on public lands to prevent future orphaned wells.

Increases minimum public land oil and gas bonding amounts to \$150,000 and \$500,000 for all of an operator’s wells on an individual lease or in an entire state, respectively.

Requires operators pay an annual fee for idled wells on public lands.

Allocates \$50 million for related research and development to identify, characterize, and mitigate undocumented orphaned wells.

The bill also makes the legitimate demand that oil and gas companies currently taking hydrocarbons out of the ground set aside enough money to do their own clean-up.