

Four N.M. lawmakers support leasing ban

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WASHINGTON, D. C.— Four members of the New Mexico delegation expressed their support of President Joe Biden’s 20-year leasing ban around Chaco Canyon.

Sens. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M. and Reps. Teresa Leger Fernández, D-N.M. and Melanie Stansbury, D-N.M. issued a statement backing the president’s announcement to ban oil and gas leasing around Chaco Canyon and surrounding areas in northwestern New Mexico for 20 years.

“President Biden’s executive order to ban leasing on federal lands around Chaco Canyon is a significant step forward in protecting this historical sacred site for generations to come,” they stated. “As we continue to work to provide additional protection through legislative action, including through the Chaco Canyon Cultural Heritage Protection Act, this administrative withdrawal will provide protections while we continue to work to permanently protect the greater Chaco area, and address the environmental, health, economic, and cultural needs of this vibrant region.”

In a letter to U. S. Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland in May, Heinrich said, “Since I’ve been in Congress, we’ve secured a series of actions that have prevented new oil and gas leasing in the vicinity of Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Today marks the beginning of the end of short-term policies that shift every year to the long-term certainty that this unique place will be protected. Chaco Canyon is one of the most precious landscapes on Earth and holds deep meaning for Tribes, Pueblos, and communities in northern New Mexico. I am grateful for Secretary Haaland’s leadership and all of the New Mexicans who have worked to preserve the integrity of Chaco’s irreplaceable resources. I will keep doing all I can to

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permanently protect the important cultural and religious sites and the sacred landscape of the greater Chaco region for future generations.”

Heinrich intends to reintroduce legislation with his colleagues from the New Mexico delegation to permanently withdraw the federal lands around Chaco Canyon from further mineral development.

Located in Northwestern New Mexico, the Greater Chaco Landscape is a region of great cultural, spiritual, and historical significance to many Pueblos and Indian Tribes and containing thousands of artifacts that date back more than one thousand years. Chaco cultural sites were listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987 and are one of only 24 such sites in the United States.