I am writing today about the Dept of Interior’s proposed rule on federal oil and gas leasing program. The obvious solutions in the revised code recommend the oil and gas companies be held accountable for cleaning up after themselves to ensure that taxpayers are not left with the costs for cleanup. Furthermore, this proposal would help protect our public lands from the threat of orphaned oil wells. Currently, the Interior Department is spending $250 dollars in taxpayer funds to clean up orphaned wells at the taxpayers’ expense. Bonding modifications are needed to assess the true cost of plugging and reclaiming well sites, so that taxpayers are not left with the cost. The bonding program needs updating to ensure that this happens.

Another concern of mine is the speculative leasing that occurs from oil and gas companies. These actions impact other uses of public lands such as recreation and wildlife habitat. The Department of the Interior needs to protect federal lands having little or no potential for oil and gas. By codifying this in regulations it would make clear that this speculative drilling be prohibited under these conditions.

The rental and leasing rates for federal onshore gas and oil leases need to be updated to better address current market rates and inflation. Furthermore, these rates need ongoing reviews and updates to best assess their market value to assure taxpayers get their fair share for the use of these leases.

My last concern involves the use of the purchase of the oil and gas leases through noncompetitive bidding strategies. We can save taxpayers’ money by using a competitive bidding process.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.