President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

Thank you for releasing the *Climate Action Plan Strategy to Reduce Methane Emissions* on March 28th. We are encouraged that the Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, and Environmental Protection Agency are poised to take action to significantly reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas sector. Both the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) should use their existing authority to enact policies that will decrease methane emissions across the oil and gas sector.

Curbing methane emissions will reduce harmful greenhouse gases and benefit the health of our citizens. Methane is a greenhouse gas commonly leaked and vented from oil and natural gas operations. According to EPA, methane is more than 20 times as potent as carbon dioxide. Moreover, the methane and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) emitted from oil and gas facilities can interact with sunlight to produce ozone or "smog," which has been found to trigger asthma attacks and aggravate conditions of people with bronchitis and emphysema.

The good news is that methane emissions from the oil and gas sector can be controlled with existing, cost-effective technology that is available and already being used by some operators. In February, Colorado became the first state to require such controls. Colorado’s new regulations serve as a model for balanced oil and gas development, and we urge the EPA and DOI to consider similar policies to reduce such methane emissions.

According to EPA’s most recent Greenhouse Gas Inventory, the oil and gas industry emitted 8.4 million metric tons of methane in 2011, roughly equivalent to carbon emissions from 60 coal-fired power plants. In 2012, EPA updated its air pollution standards for natural gas wells; these standards will help reduce volatile organic compounds emissions and methane gas. These new standards are a laudable step, but the rule does not apply to oil wells and the agency did not address existing infrastructure that emits large quantities of methane and, in many cases VOCs and air toxics as well. We urge the EPA, acting within its existing authority, to more broadly address methane emissions from new and existing oil and gas facilities across the supply chain.

With approximately 14 percent of U.S. onshore gas production and 8.5 percent of U.S. onshore oil production taking place on federal lands, DOI is uniquely positioned to make meaningful progress in reducing emissions and minimizing waste of a natural resource. Operators on public lands regularly vent and flare methane, wasting publicly owned natural gas resources. DOI should take appropriate steps to implement “best management practices” for reducing air pollution and methane leaks at oil and gas facilities on federal lands.
The Government Accountability Office estimates that 40 percent of gas that is currently lost to the atmosphere where it fuels dangerous climate change could instead be cost-effectively captured, generating new royalties of $23 million and cutting 16.5 million tons of CO2-e annually. These common sense steps to improve oil and gas production on federal lands benefit the environment and the taxpayer.

To enhance our nation’s energy security and reliability and to protect our environment, methane emissions must be reduced. Proper oversight investments in critical infrastructure will help to achieve that goal. We appreciate your attention to this issue, and look forward to working with you as federal agencies implement their obligations under the methane strategy.

Sincerely,

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

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cc: Administrator Gina McCarthy

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