

Dear Secretary Zinke,

As faith leaders in ministry in Las Vegas, Nevada, we are committed to justice for our communities and all of God's creation. Particularly in this year when we mark 50 years since the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, we reflect on what it will take to continue his legacy for racial equity. Today, we write to you with urgency about maintaining the protections afforded by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Methane Waste Prevention rule.

Nationwide, communities of color bear disproportionate life-threatening burdens of oil and gas industry operations on public lands. The 2017 NAACP report "Fumes Across the Fenceline" report notes that natural gas emissions and summer ozone season combined contribute to African American children suffering an estimated 138,000 asthma attacks and 101,000 lost school days annually. In addition, over one million African Americans live in counties that face a cancer risk above the Environmental Protection Agency's level of concern from toxics emitted by natural gas facilities.

In addition to concerns for our communities' health, we perceive methane leakage as a senselessly wasteful practice which hurts our economy. Nationwide, oil and gas companies squander enough natural gas to heat one million homes. The wasted methane could contribute to tax revenue and jobs if sold. Wasting methane is not in keeping with God's call to wisely manage the gifts of creation.

The BLM oversees 67 percent of the lands in our state of Nevada, and most oil and gas leases by the Bureau of Land Management occur in the West. Yet, there has not been a single public hearing in the West regarding the rescission or weakening of the BLM Methane Waste Prevention rule.

For these reasons and more, we call on the Department of Interior to lengthen the public comment period as well as host a series of public hearings in Western states. Ultimately, we call on the Department of Interior to uphold and strengthen the BLM Methane Waste Prevention rule, rather than try to find ways to rescind or weaken it.

We seek moral leadership in the care of our public lands, our communities' health, and God's good creation. We pray the Department of Interior will hear these urgent requests and change course.

Respectfully,

Rev. Ralph Williamson, First AME Church
Rev. Raymond Giddens, Unity Baptist Church
Rev. Kelcy West, Nehemiah Ministries
Rev. Wayne O'Bannon, Centennial Hills SDA Church
Rev. Welton Smith, Evergreen Baptist Church
Rev. M. Chris Brown, New Revelation Baptist Church
Rev. Leonard Jackson, Faith Organizing Alliance
Rev. Oneil Madden, Abundent Life SDA Church