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July 29, 2014 202-224-6244

**Heller Seeks to Streamline Domestic Energy Production**

*Legislation increases efficiency in permitting process*

**(Washington, D.C.) –** Today, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a hearing seeking to break the logjam at the federal Bureau of Land Management in order to efficiently process permits for energy production on federal lands. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) and Jon Tester (D-MT) addressed this issue by introducing legislation, [the *Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act*](http://www.scribd.com/doc/124987076/Renewable-Energy-on-Public-Lands)*,* streamlining permitting for renewable energy projects on public lands.

“Considering more than 87 percent of Nevada’s land is owned by the federal government, creating a more efficient permitting process for renewable energy on public lands is a win-win situation for all parties involved,” **Heller said**. “This legislation promotes the development of domestic energy resources on public lands while protecting native wildlife habitat and investing in our state and counties.”

*Currently, obtaining Bureau of Land Management permits for solar and wind projects on public lands can take years – without any rights to the land until after all the environmental assessments are completed and full permit approval. The Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act creates a leasing pilot project to devise a straightforward process treating renewable energy development similar to traditional sources of energy development like oil and gas. This more stable and efficient process makes long-term planning for companies easier.*

*The changes in this legislation ensure local governments’ benefit from projects regardless of where the power is sold, establishing a direct royalty system from renewables supporting conservation, public works, and federal land access projects.*

**Remarks as prepared:**

Chair Landrieu and Ranking Member Murkowski, thank you for holding a hearing on the two important public lands energy development bills before us today. In western states like Nevada, where over 85 percent of the lands within our borders are controlled by the federal government, proposals like the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act and the BLM Permit Processing Improvement Act can significantly benefit the economies of Western rural communities.

Nevada is blessed with an abundance of natural resources. The mining, energy, ranching, timber, and outdoor recreation industries have served as an important pillar in our state’s history. They are a central component of our local economy and have been for generations. These industries are struggling, in large part due to the “price of doing business” on federal lands.

Often, companies looking to create jobs in tell me the length, difficulty, and uncertainty of the permitting process is depressing development and discouraging investors from committing to U.S. projects. One company told me, “It is becoming bad business to even try to get a project off the ground when federal lands are involved.”

It is no coincidence that our public lands counties are suffering from unemployment rates well above the national average. We have to get the federal government out of the way of our job producers so our western states can capitalize on their energy potential and can drive the nation’s 21st century energy strategy.

Energy is one of Nevada’s greatest assets. In 2013, Nevada ranked second in the nation for geothermal production and third for solar production. Eighteen percent of our total electricity generation came from renewables, well above the national average of thirteen percent. Our public lands play a critical role in that mission, but uncertainty in the permitting process impedes or delays our ability to harness their full potential.

That is why I have teamed up with my friend Senator Jon Tester of Montana on the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act. The public land management agencies need a permitting process tailored to the unique characteristics and impacts of renewable energy projects; currently permits for wind and solar development are completed under the same process for other surface uses, like pipelines, roads, or power lines. That just doesn’t make sense.

This strong bipartisan proposal implements reforms that streamline bureaucratic red tape that gets in the way of renewable energy job creation, while ensuring our local communities benefit most from these projects.

Additionally, our legislation aims to tap the vast renewable energy potential at our nation’s many military installations. Many of our nation’s military facilities are located in remote locations which are ideally suited for energy development.

This past weekend, the Las Vegas Sun reported that Nellis Air Force Base is on the verge of producing more renewable energy than any other Air Force installation in the entire country. The Air Force, in tandem with NV Energy, our states largest electrical utility, and SunPower, a California-based solar panel maker, plans to install a second solar plant at Nellis. This 19-megawatt facility will allow the base to get close to half its energy from renewable sources.

Our bill directs the Department of Defense to work on an initial blueprint that will identify appropriate areas where the military can pursue its important mission in defending our nation while also contributing to our nation’s energy needs.

In addition, the legislation establishes a revenue sharing mechanism that ensures a fair return for all. Since federal lands are not taxable, state and local governments deserve a share of the revenues from the sales of energy production on public lands within their borders. These resources will help local governments deliver critical services and develop much-needed capital improvement projects, such as road maintenance, public safety, and law enforcement. Additionally, revenues will be utilized to support conservation projects and to increase outdoor recreation such as hunting, fishing, and hiking.

These activities also are an important economic engine in the rural parts of my state.

I am pleased to have Nye County Commissioner Lorinda Wichman at the Committee today to help explain to the committee why this part of our bill is so important. Lorinda is a friend and an important leader in our state. She works tirelessly not only for her constituents in Nye County, but for the entire state on natural resources-related issues. It is a pleasure to have her here, and I want to thank her for making the cross-country trip on such short notice. Nye County has some of the best sunshine for solar development in the entire country, we just need to get the federal government out of the way so it can be utilized. She has an important story to tell which I think will give members of this committee more insight on how important this bill is for our communities.

The Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act is an important step toward ensuring our public lands can be utilized to implement an “all-of-the above” energy strategy. Before I conclude, I’d like to also thank Senators Udall and Barrasso for their work on the BLM Permit Processing Improvement Act, also being considered today. I am an original cosponsor of this legislation, which builds on the success of the BLM pilot project program implemented in the Energy Policy Act of 2005.

This bill is another piece to the puzzle that will allow our federal lands to play a major role in our country’s all-of-the-above energy future. The West has some of our nation’s richest oil and gas potential, but we need to keep pushing policies that will allow for its responsible development. It is clear that the Pilot Project has been successful in facilitating the development of domestic energy resources, and I am pleased to support its extension and expansion.

In Nevada, we do have an exciting oil play currently being studied in Elko County. The Udall-Barrasso bill is important to that shale play’s future if it does take off, as the bill gives the land management agencies greater flexibility to prioritize resources to new areas as production demands shift.

I am pleased to join this diverse bipartisan group of senators working to enact the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act and the BLM Permit Processing Improvement Act. These reforms can reduce our nation’s reliance on other countries for the resources we need to power our economy and revitalize our rural western economies. I look forward to continuing our work to implement these common-sense proposals when we return to session in September.

Thank you again Senators Landrieu and Murkowski for the opportunity to testify before the committee, and for your work to move the ball forward on these proposals.

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