



## DON SCHREIBER

WLN Board Member, Rancher  
Rio Arriba County, New Mexico



### YOU'VE WORKED HARD TO GET THE BLM METHANE WASTE RULE IMPLEMENTED. WHY WAS THIS SO IMPORTANT?

As a family on the frontline of oil and gas development and production here in New Mexico's San Juan Basin, we live daily with the terrible effects of methane emissions from gas and oil wells. We learned right away that in order to hold oil companies, and regulators like BLM, accountable for this waste and harmful pollution, it was necessary to take personal responsibility for protection of the environment, our health, climate change and economic consequences.

For a small ranch, that meant struggling against the most powerful companies in history, and often, against the very federal and state agencies that are supposed to be stewards of our multi-use public lands.

So in 2014 when the Obama administration's Council on Environmental Quality made reduction of methane waste a priority, we seized that opportunity to engage fully and to try to help get the BLM Methane Waste Prevention Rule adopted. We had already invested so much of ourselves in the ranch and the broader fight against methane waste and pollution, and we knew helping to get this rule in place was the right thing not only for us, but for all affected by methane waste and pollution.

THE U.S. HOUSE VOTED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY IN JANUARY 2017 TO THROW OUT THE NEWLY MINTED BLM RULE THROUGH THE CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW ACT. WHEN THE U.S. SENATE TOOK UP THE CRA VOTE, YOU AND WLN DIRECTOR GWEN LACHELT FLEW TO WASHINGTON TO MEET WITH SENATORS. DID YOU HAVE ANY HOPE YOU WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL IN DEFENDING THE RULE?

Anti-conservation forces in the Senate had already used the obscure CRA rule to roll back a dozen environmental protections. Just a simple majority was required. The 2016 BLM Methane Waste Rule was the 13th CRA target, their crowning blow to rules and regulations designed to protect the environment and stop the waste of natural resources.

At that point in May 2017 when we were notified that the BLM Rule was immediately coming up for a vote, it was anti-conservation: 12, environment: 0. So there wasn't a lot of hope to go around.

What Gwen and I discussed was our long history of fighting uphill battles together before, and how we felt it was our duty, not just to ourselves, but to the environment, to the people living daily with the harmful impacts of oil and gas drilling and production, to stay in the fight until the very last. We didn't talk about the odds; we talked about how fast we could get a plane ticket to Washington.

## WHAT DID IT FEEL LIKE TO WIN?

Euphoric. Moments after the vote, New Mexico Senator Martin Heinrich came out to the Senate Gallery to congratulate us, followed by Senator Tom Udall, then Senators Tester, Cantwell and Bennet. This was a victory for these environmental champions and all the leadership they had provided in getting the rule in place to start with, and a vindication of their careers of environmental championship. We must especially recognize Senator John McCain who, at the last minute, cast his vote with us. It was dramatic in the Senate chambers with Senator McConnell trying a last-minute parliamentary maneuver to sideline Senator McCain, but that didn't work and we won.

Footnote: Gwen was the last to speak personally to Senator McCain as she chased him down a hall and into an elevator. He was so cordial, and we'll always credit Gwen with being the straw that broke the CRA's back.

THAT CRA VOTE DIDN'T STOP THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION FROM RESCINDING THE RULE AND MOST RECENTLY, THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA REINSTATED THE BLM METHANE RULE. OBVIOUSLY, THE RULE STILL HAS TO PREVAIL IN WYOMING. YOU HAVE CONTINUED TO FIGHT FOR METHANE RULES DESPITE ALL THESE CHALLENGES. WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR LEADERS AND ELECTED OFFICIALS TO KEEP THE PRESSURE ON, AND WHAT TYPES OF PRACTICAL TACTICS AND ACTIONS DO YOU THINK ARE ACTUALLY EFFECTIVE IN PUSHING BACK AGAINST THIS ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS?



Locally elected leaders and officials have a power that higher levels of government do not have. They are part of their community, they are a neighbor and a friend, they are someone who lives daily with the impacts of federal policies on our environment. That's just not something a Senator or Representative or Governor does. There is a statewide constituency, and while someone like Senator Heinrich can lead us in Washington, he relies on us – especially local, elected officials – to bring him the personal stories of what a federal policy does – both its costs and its rewards.

In speaking on behalf of the environment, I always try to make my personal experiences, fears and desires known to the decision-makers in Washington. It takes a little courage to step out from behind a big chart or graph and talk about your fears for your granddaughter's health when she rides on the ranch, or your own misgivings about what the future of the ranch might be like for her. Or your desires to correct federal policies that have been so negligent and so harmful for so long that they created a methane "hotspot" right over our heads that you can see from space.

You cannot speak passionately without risking part of yourself, but I have found so many good career government employees at every level, in every agency that will respond when you do, even in this current administration. Do your homework, know the facts and put yourself on the line. It's a risk, you may lose, but look what happened here. We won.

