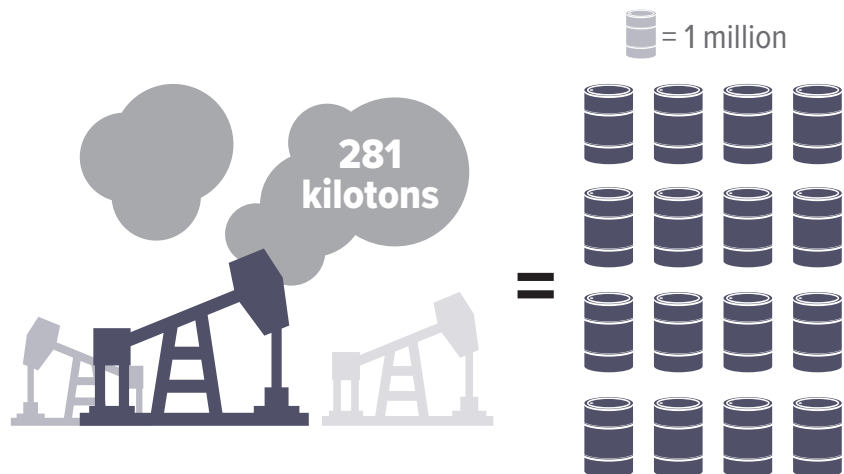


Plugging ‘Orphan Wells’ and Cleaning Abandoned Mines

JUNE 2021

In 2018, orphan wells in America released **281 kilotons** of methane, the equivalent of **16 million** barrels of crude oil.



“Orphan” oil and gas wells — formerly operational wells that have been abandoned by their operators — pose a clear and present environmental hazard. Per one estimation by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there are over two million unplugged orphan oil and gas wells in the United States. According to Resources for the Future (RFF), these wells release the methane equivalent of 9.5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide every year.

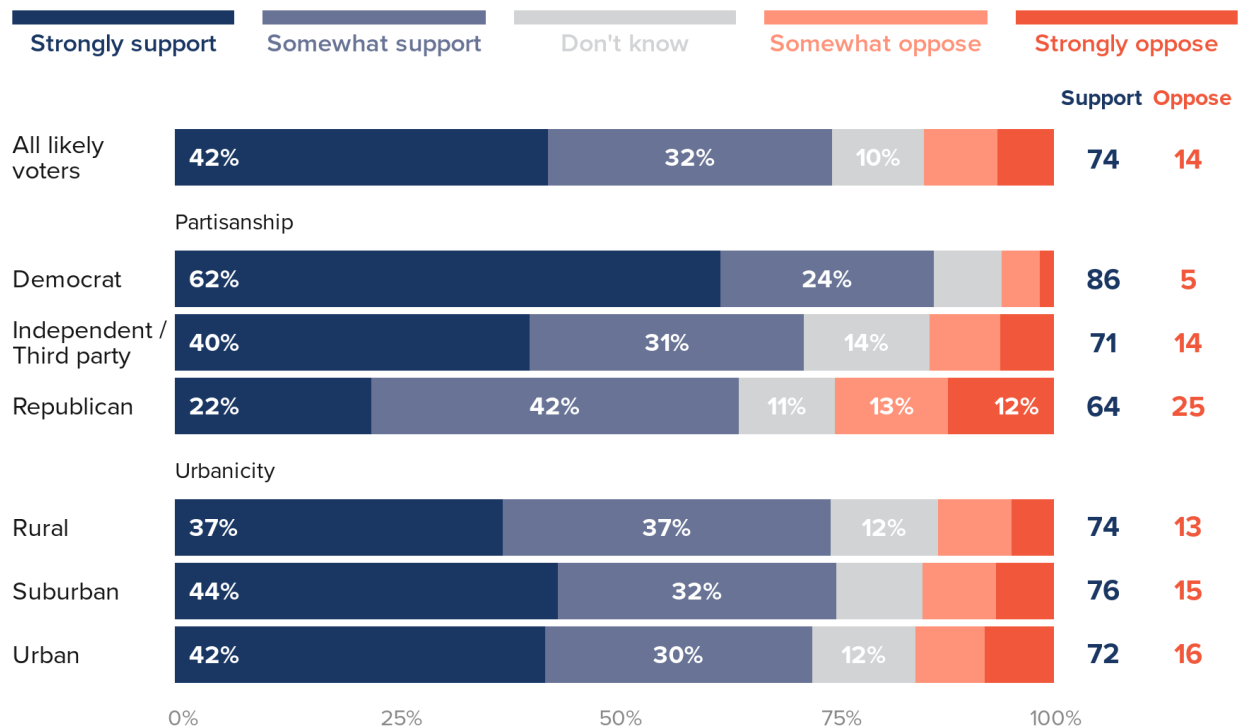
While these orphan wells pose an immense risk to both communities and the climate, they also present a significant job-creation opportunity. Researchers at RFF and Columbia University estimate that federal investments could create 120,000 jobs to plug 500,000 orphan wells across the country. To capitalize on this economic opportunity while stopping the release of dangerous methane, the American Jobs Plan (AJP) includes a proposed \$16 billion to plug these wells and clean abandoned mines.

In Congress, Representative Teresa Fernandez (D-NM) has proposed legislation to clean up orphan oil and gas wells, though Fernandez’s legislation only seeks \$8 billion in funding. A bipartisan push by Senators Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) and Kevin Cramer (R-ND) seeks an even smaller investment totaling around \$4.6 billion. The AJP proposal is more robust than either, and falls within researchers’ cost estimates for an effective federal well cleanup program. It is welcome that the White House understands the importance of removing these environmental hazards and seeks a response appropriate in scale.

Moreover, voters across party lines back the AJP’s proposal to fund the cleanup of abandoned oil and gas wells across the country. Nearly three-quarters of all likely voters (74 percent), including overwhelming majorities of Democrats (86 percent), Independents (71 percent), and Republicans (74 percent), support this investment. Like investments in rural broadband, this proposal enjoys broad backing among rural (74 percent support), suburban (76 percent support), and urban (72 percent support) voters. Given both the immense potential for job-creation and popularity of this proposal, Democratic lawmakers should ensure that the AJP’s proposed funding for this critical task is not pared down in the final legislation.

Voters Support Funding the Cleanup of Abandoned Oil and Gas Wells

Do you support or oppose the following proposal in the American Jobs Plan: Cleaning up abandoned oil and gas wells



May 5–6, 2021 survey of 1,328 likely voters

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