

## ***COALITION TO PROTECT THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT***

### **Officials' Past Statements on Retiring Front Leases**

In recent years, Montana's elected leaders and Bush administration officials have indicated support for retiring oil and gas leases on Montana's Rocky Mountain Front. Here are excerpts of news articles and press releases in which officials staked out positions.

#### **1) Senator Conrad Burns:**

"As Chairman of the Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, I am currently considering legislative language to prevent new oil and gas leasing on the Rocky Mountain Front. Under the proposed language, valid existing rights would be protected until they expire or are relinquished to the federal government. A current leaseholder has a choice of keeping their existing lease, donating their leases to the federal government or selling the leases to a third party."

*-- May 2006: Burns letter to concerned constituents*

"The decision to transfer leases should be made by the leaseholders. Congress has no business interfering in this, especially from a financial aspect....If opponents of petroleum development ...want to protect the [Front], then they should buy out the leaseholders."

*-- June 10, 2005: Burns Press Release: "Burns Adds Money for Rocky Mountain Front Easements."*

"There is precedent for private groups purchasing land that is important to them from a conservation perspective. I think it would be worthwhile for groups such as 'Save the Front', and the Montana Wilderness Association to explore these options. The leaseholders are business people, and they are capable of making rational business decisions, and I leave it to them to decide, but I think this is a discussion that is long overdue."

*-- July 27, 2004: Burns Press Release: "Burns Calls for Private Enterprise Option to Front Leases."*

#### **2) Bush Administration and Department of Interior:**

"Stopping work on the EIS will give all parties a chance to step back and look at other alternatives to resolve the issue of energy development in the Blackleaf area. Some of the alternatives could include providing the lessee with credits toward other leases; buying out the lease; exchanging the lease for other public land leases; or completing the EIS in the future.... BLM does not have the authority to begin work on buying out or exchanging leases. The course of action would need to be initiated through the lessee and Congress."

*-- October 4, 2004: Montana BLM web site and in their press packet*

#### **3) Senator Max Baucus:**

"I fully support finding solutions that are fair to leaseholders. I want to look for ways to fairly compensate lessees for investments made if you decide to leave the Front rather than waste years and millions fighting to explore for uncertain oil and gas reserves."

*-- April 19, 2005: Baucus letter to Front leaseholders*

"This habitat is too rich, this area is too important to our outdoor heritage as Montanans to expose it to noise, pollution, and disturbance gas and oil rigs would bring. Let's give leaseholders the option of doing the right thing and find a less sensitive place to drill.....The amount of recoverable gas and oil in the Front is not nearly enough to justify damaging the higher recreational, wildlife and scenic values associated with the Front."

*-- April 2004: Baucus' scoping comments on Blackleaf project*