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BRUCE PENDERY

Clean air is a Wyoming value

One of the highest callings of our government is to protect the security and safety of our lands, homes, and communities. But here in Sublette County, the federal government is failing us.

According to the scientists who most recently advised the Environmental Protection Agency on ozone pollution, the current federal standard for allowable ozone in the air we breathe does not adequately protect our health.

Fortunately, the founders of this country recognized the state's primacy in such matters. If we feel the federal government is failing us, we can set a more appropriate standard ourselves.

To that end, a Pinedale-area group, Citizens United for Responsible Energy Development, has requested that the Wyoming Environmental Quality Council set the ozone standard for Sublette County to something that, according to the experts, is safer for our community and for our community's children.

When the place you live suddenly experiences ozone alerts, you quickly get educated on the topic. And in recognition of the well-documented health threats associated with the current federal ozone standard, the Pinedale Town Council has unanimously passed a resolution in support of this request.

Why is the town council on board? Because the scientific support for changing the ozone standard is overwhelming. The EPA's Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee unanimously recommended a standard between 60 parts per billion and 70 ppb. The Clean Air committee is not some rogue group of scientists — it is a

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Perspective

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congressionally mandated committee that is required to advise and make recommendations to the EPA administrator.

The CURED group is made up of regular citizens, including mothers, fathers, grandparents, retired educators and others, and we were taken aback when the Casper Star-Tribune's May 1 editorial called our request "overreaching." The editorial board encouraged us to follow "federal experts" who "are in the best position to determine the appropriate standard for ozone pollution."

But when you do your homework on this topic you quickly learn that the federal bureaucrats who made this most recent decision about the ozone standard ignored the sound scientific and medical advice they received from their own experts. In short, they blew it. So why should we wait for the federal government to get it right, when our health is at risk?

The EPA ignored the advice of other experts, as well, including more than 100 scientists and medical doctors, the American Lung Association, the EPA Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee, and the American Thoracic

Society, all of whom have also recommended the ozone standards be stricter than the current national standard. Most of these professionals recommend it be set at 60 ppb. The World Health Organization recommends an even stricter standard of 51 ppb.

Perhaps we aren't reaching enough with our request for 65 ppb?

Asking for healthier air in Sublette County is not overreaching. We recognize that the oil and gas industry is implementing technology now to address the ozone problem, and the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality is working to make needed changes for cleaner air in Sublette County. We just want them to set the right target to protect the health of our community.

Three decades ago, "federal experts" in Washington were wrong about sulfur dioxide pollution, and Wyoming took the lead in protecting its citizens by making our state's standard for the pollutant stricter than the federal standard. In 1972, the Atomic Energy Commission supported the proposed project Wagon Wheel, which would have set off underground nuclear detonations to release natural gas in Sublette County, and citizens took the initiative to prevent it.

Citizens standing up to protect our communities and our health is a Wyoming way of life. And clean air is a Wyoming value we should always cherish. Our state needs to take the lead on ozone. It's not overreaching — it's common sense.

■ Mary Lynn Worl of Pinedale is chairwoman of Citizens United for Responsible Energy Development.

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