Opening Statement of Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee

Spotlight Forum:
"Mind Over Methane: The No-Brainer Climate, Economic, and Health Solution"
July 24, 2025

Let me call to order this spotlight forum to discuss methane abatement, titled "**Mind Over Methane: The No-Brainer Climate, Economic, and Health Solution**."

Methane is a greenhouse gas more than 80 times as potent as carbon dioxide. The oil and gas sector is the largest industrial source of methane emissions, and this dangerous, poisonous, explosive gas is released into our atmosphere at every stage of oil and gas production.

Mitigating methane emissions is achievable and affordable. It saves lives and lowers energy costs for families. And it is one of the most important things we can do for the climate in the near term.

Because methane is short-lived in the atmosphere, reducing emissions now can appreciably slow and even reverse warming. It is estimated that up to 30 percent of the warming we have so far experienced is due to methane. By rapidly reducing methane emissions now, we can buy ourselves time to tackle the much harder problem of eliminating carbon dioxide emissions and removing billions of excess carbon dioxide already in the atmosphere.

And yet, the Trump Administration is considering rolling back methane abatement policies alongside its broader attacks on commonsense, money-saving climate safety solutions.

Meanwhile, Republicans in Congress used their majority to cripple the first-ever national climate pollution pricing mechanism – the Waste Emissions Charge on methane.

The purpose of today's spotlight forum is to make clear that despite Republicans' efforts to support the fossil fuel industry's pollute-for-free business model, Democrats will continue to shine a light on the methane problem and fight to address it.

Methane emissions are a major driver of the catastrophic flooding, fires, and deadly heat waves we are experiencing with ever-greater frequency. And they are making it harder to afford and obtain home insurance across the country. When you can't get insurance on your home and you try to sell it, you've got a problem because the buyer can't get a mortgage if your home is uninsurable. This is how climate change risk creates an insurance crisis, which rolls over into a mortgage crisis, which drives down property values so badly that it threatens a 2008-style national economic crisis.

Cutting methane emissions is not just good for the climate. If you like breathing clean air and saving money on your energy bills, you'll like methane action too. Every year, smog formed by methane pollution causes nearly 30,000 premature deaths in the United States. And because methane is the principal component of natural gas, fixing methane leaks in the oil and gas sector or collecting methane from landfills often pays for

itself by capturing otherwise-wasted gas. Exxon's own website is clear: "Reducing methane leaks is smart business."

Several of the world's largest oil and gas companies have set a goal to achieve near-zero methane emissions across their operations, and many claim to have achieved a 0.2% methane intensity from production. But to satisfy the worst methane polluters, the Republican party is rolling back even those policies that industry majors claim they want to keep in place.

In 2022, Congress passed the Waste Emissions Charge, which I designed, pricing methane pollution in the oil and gas sector in excess of federal standards *and the industry's own voluntary targets*. This charge would have reduced 1.2 million metric tons of methane and generated nearly $9 billion in revenues through 2035. I say "would have" because that fee is now delayed until 2035, thanks to congressional Republicans.

Trump's EPA wants to axe methane mitigation rules for the fossil fuel industry, and it wants to hide this pollution problem from the public by dismantling EPA's "Super-Emitter" program and shuttering pollution reporting programs.

Trump's DOT has rolled back requirements to fix leaky natural gas pipelines, which waste over $600 million worth of gas each year, losses that consumers pay for in surcharges on their utility bills.

The good news is that states, cities, NGOs, even some industry actors are now employing satellites, planes, and drones to measure methane emissions. These efforts have identified

methane emissions four times higher than reported. That gives us a platform of facts to reduce and eventually eliminate these emissions.

Let me close with this: methane is leaking into our air, warming our planet, raising our cost of living, and choking our children — whether the fossil fuel industry reports it or not.

We will not stand down. We will not be silent. We will keep sounding the alarm—because the danger is real.