



WYOMING SENATE DISTRICT 3

FOR RELEASE Immediately

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Are We Building Economic Development—or Creating Wyoming’s Next Crisis?

By Senator Cheri Steinmetz | Senate District 3

Economic development should strengthen communities, create lasting prosperity, and secure our future. But in Wyoming today, we must ask: are we truly building economic development—or are we creating our own crisis?

Across the state, industrial-scale wind and solar projects, hydrogen hubs, and massive data centers are expanding at a rapid pace. These ventures are often touted as progress, but their impacts on land, water, and community stability suggest something far more troubling.

Private Rights vs. Public Policy

Private property rights are the cornerstone of American liberty, but they are not absolute. The **Harm Principle**—articulated by John Stuart Mill in 1859 and echoed in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*—holds that liberty ends where it causes harm to others. When private property use escalates into industrial operations that impose costs on neighbors and communities, it ceases to be a matter of private rights alone and becomes a matter of **public policy**.

When a family installs rooftop solar panels or a small wind turbine to offset ranch power costs, that is a private use of property. It has little to no impact on neighbors, the broader grid, or surrounding land. But when wind or solar expands into sprawling **industrial or commercial facilities**—regulated under state and federal siting laws, tied to federal subsidies, and designed to export power across state lines—those projects cease to be merely “private property.” They become matters of **public policy**.

This is not about denying individuals the right to generate their own power. It is about recognizing the point where private use ends and public consequences begin. At that threshold, the public has not only a right but a responsibility to weigh in.

Land, Water, and Community Costs

The scale of land use is staggering. On average, **wind requires 70,000 acres per gigawatt of electricity, while solar consumes between 3,500 and 10,000 acres per gigawatt.** To put that in perspective, a single gigawatt of wind can take up around **110 square miles—nearly the land area of Denver, Colorado, which spans 154 square miles.** By contrast, a **coal or natural gas plant producing the same gigawatt of power typically requires less than 640 acres—about one square mile.**

These projects are not built on isolated wasteland—they often take over productive farm and ranch land, permanently removing it from agricultural use. They alter wildlife habitat, reshape communities, and lower the value of neighboring properties.

Water use is an equally pressing concern. **Hydrogen hubs** and **data centers**—including AI-driven computing facilities—consume extraordinary amounts of water to operate. In an arid state like Wyoming, diverting scarce water away from irrigation and municipal needs to sustain speculative industries risks destabilizing the very foundation of rural life.

More Than a Matter of Security

Some argue that any new source of power enhances national security. But reliability matters more than raw megawatts. Weather-dependent generation displaces steady baseload power, creating strain on the grid. When paired with the round-the-clock demands of data centers and industrial projects, that strain grows. A fragile grid is not secure. Yet the larger issue isn't only about electrons—it's about what kind of Wyoming we are leaving to our children.

Keeping Our Children in Wyoming

Proponents of industrial energy projects often argue that these ventures will create jobs to keep our children in the state. But the reality is stark: short-term construction jobs and a handful of permanent positions at a solar farm or wind facility will not sustain Wyoming's next generation.

What truly draws young people home is **Wyoming itself**—our open spaces, our agricultural and energy industries tied to the land, and our communities rooted in custom and culture. When we protect those foundations, we give our children a reason to stay. When we sacrifice them to outside developers chasing subsidies, we rob our young people of the very future we want them to inherit.

Culture, Heritage, and Stewardship

Wyoming is not just a place—it is a people. Our culture is built on independence, stewardship, and respect for the land. Our ranching and farming heritage is more than an economic driver; it is the fabric of our identity.

Converting vast swaths of open space into industrial energy zones does more than scar the land—it undermines the cultural identity that sets Wyoming apart. If we are not careful, we risk becoming tenants in our own state, while outside interests dictate how our land and water are used.

A Call to Balance

Our ancestors understood that prosperity meant more than profit. It meant protecting the land, water, and way of life for those who would come after them. As we consider Wyoming's future, we must draw a clear line: **private projects that benefit families are to be protected, but industrial projects with broad public consequences must be carefully scrutinized.**

Economic development is vital. But when so-called development undermines our land, water, culture, and communities, it is not progress—it is decline in disguise. Wyoming must not confuse speculation for prosperity. We must safeguard the resources and traditions that define us, so that future generations inherit not a crisis, but a legacy.