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## Energy firms "threatened"

**Perceived bias leads industry to organize**  
 By Steve Raabe Denver Post Staff Writer  
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Colorado oil and gas producers are organizing to influence government policy in reaction to concerns about a perceived anti-energy bias in the state.

Chief among their worries are a reconstituted oil-and-gas commission that reduces energy- industry representation, efforts to delay a plan for drilling on the scenic Roan Plateau in western Colorado, and a movement to stop natural-gas production in Moffat County's Vermillion Basin.

"This vital, growing industry is threatened by overregulation," said Fred Barrett, chief executive of oil-and-gas producer Bill Barrett Corp. "We as an industry need to find better ways to tell the public what the costs of certain public-policy decisions are."

A new organization to advocate for increased energy development and less regulation, Americans for American Energy, will be based in Golden and run by a prominent Colorado energy executive, Greg Schnacke.

"If Colorado doesn't take steps to address these kinds of (regulatory) obstacles, it will hurt the state's competitiveness relative to other states," said Robert Wright, chief executive of Denver-based gas producer PRB Energy Inc.

Colorado officials deny that they're trying to stifle energy development. They say recent legislation, and positions taken by Gov. Bill Ritter and U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar, is intended to protect the environment and public health from rapid growth in oil and gas production.

"We understand the major importance of the oil-and-gas industry in Colorado," said Harris Sherman, director of the Department of Natural Resources, in remarks Wednesday to the Colorado Oil and Gas Association's Rocky Mountain Natural Gas Strategy Conference.

"The state of Colorado and the (Ritter) administration want to work with you. This is the largest industry in Colorado," Sherman said, referring to the energy sector's 71,000 employees and \$23 billion contribution to the state's economy.

Sherman said energy companies shouldn't worry about a law passed this year that expands the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission from seven to nine members, yet reduces the number of energy-industry representatives from five to three.

The commission oversees the state agency that approves energy companies' applications for drilling permits.

Energy-industry officials said they're concerned about how the commission will implement new legislative directives for greater consideration of environmental, public-health and wildlife protections.

"It's hard to plan with uncertainty hanging over us," said Andrew Bremner, director of governmental affairs for the Denver-based Independent Petroleum Association of Mountain States

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