

Navigating the Ever-Changing Political Landscape as a Landman.

Election Year Again

My wife dreads election season, as many people do, but for her, the reason is a bit more personal - me. She can't stand how I obsess over every policy proposal, scrutinize every mention of import and export regulations, and track every debate on fracking and green energy like a watchdog. The reality is that, for better or worse, when President Biden shuts down the Keystone XL Pipeline or President Trump penalizes Chinese ships at U.S. ports, these decisions send shockwaves through the landman industry. And that means I hang on to every word, every announcement, every shift in policy.

As landmen, we're expected to keep our work separate from politics. Expressing an opinion can be as risky as an outright insult when negotiating land rights with property owners. Yet, behind closed doors, we're all watching, waiting, and quietly rooting for the candidates who will best protect our jobs, our livelihoods, and our bottom lines. When the industry is so directly impacted by the actions of the sitting president or the majority party, the real question becomes: How do we, as landmen, navigate the ever-changing political landscape?

Are we not Landmen?

I believe the key to navigating industry changes lies in understanding what we truly do, not focusing on the losses, but on how we apply our skills to the opportunities before us.

I'm often reminded of the famous quote attributed to Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald's: "You're not in the burger business. You're in the real estate business." This mindset should shape the way we, as landmen, view our profession. Too often, we attach ourselves to the specific products or industries we serve rather than recognizing the core of our occupation. I am not in the oil and gas industry or the energy industry, despite spending most of my career in that space. The reality is that landmen gravitate toward energy because that's where the money is, but we are not pipeliners or linemen. We are landmen. And that means we work with land and the rights that come with it.

My first job as a landman wasn't in oil and gas, it was in telecommunications. I worked as a site acquisition specialist, securing locations for pager towers in rural Alabama for Titan Towers. I remember sifting through tax maps, pulling tax cards, and doing title searches, trying to track down landowners who wanted to stay off the grid. The thrill of finally finding a physical address (something more than just a P.O. Box or an offshore mailing address) was unmatched. Negotiating a tower lease with a hostile (sometimes borderline violent)

landowner and walking away victoriously with an executed document? Now *that* was a rush.

Over time, the industry evolved. Pagers gave way to cell phones, and by 2000, an insatiable demand for bandwidth led to a fiber-optic boom. I spent years securing leases across the Southwest, making that expansion possible. By 2007, I transitioned into oil and gas pipeline work. And now? I'm working on underground electrical power lines.

Yet, through all of it, I have remained a landman. Whether it's a telecommunications tower, a crude oil pipeline, or a power transmission line, the core responsibilities of our profession remain the same. And recognizing these fundamentals is what keeps us adaptable—and employed—through any political climate. Our work revolves around three primary areas: Title Research, Negotiation, and Compliance.

1. Title Research & Ownership Verification

- Research courthouse records, deeds, leases, and legal documents to determine land and mineral ownership.
- Verify title chains and resolve any disputes over ownership or rights.
- Ensure there are no encumbrances, liens, or competing claims on the property.

2. Negotiating Surface, Oil, Gas, and Mineral Agreements

- Work with landowners to negotiate lease agreements for oil, gas, or mineral exploration and production.
- Work with landowners to negotiate rights and easements across lands and other easements.
- Determine and offer fair compensation for rights, lease bonuses, royalty payments, and surface damages.
- Draft contracts, lease agreements, and other legal documents related to land and mineral rights.

3. Due Diligence & Compliance

- Ensure all contracts and leases comply with state and federal regulations.
- Conduct due diligence for acquisitions, mergers, and divestitures of oil and gas assets.
- Work closely with legal teams to resolve disputes or legal challenges related to land ownership.

4. Maintaining Land Records & Agreements

- Keep detailed records of leases, contracts, and land transactions.
- Monitor lease expirations, renewals, and obligations to ensure compliance.
- Assist companies in securing rights-of-way, surface use agreements, and other land-use permissions.

These fundamentals should serve as the foundation of every landman's expertise and responsibilities.

The New Policy took my Job!

Many landmen find themselves on edge when the U.S. energy industry undergoes significant shifts following presidential elections, as each political party brings distinct policy priorities that shape the sector's direction.

Republican administrations typically prioritize energy independence by expanding fossil fuel production. This approach often includes reducing environmental regulations and streamlining permitting processes to encourage oil, gas, and coal development. For example, during Donald Trump's presidency, his administration focused on strengthening domestic fossil fuel industries by rolling back environmental protections and promoting energy dominance.

Democratic administrations, on the other hand, generally emphasize transitioning to clean and renewable energy sources. Their policies often include increased investments in renewables, stricter environmental regulations, and a commitment to international climate agreements. For instance, the Inflation Reduction Act aimed to accelerate renewable energy adoption through various incentives and tax credits.

These differing policy approaches highlight the energy industry's need to continually adapt to the political landscape, aligning strategies with the current administration's priorities and regulatory framework.

Recent Energy Policy Changes Under President Trump (2025-Present)

Since returning to office in January 2025, President Donald Trump has enacted several major policy changes affecting the U.S. energy industry:

1. Withdrawal from International Climate Agreements

- On January 20, 2025, President Trump signed *Executive Order 14162*, titled "*Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements*," directing

the immediate withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement and other international climate commitments.

2. Expansion of Fossil Fuel Production

- **Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Exports:** The Department of Energy lifted the pause on LNG exports, resuming the approval process for pending applications to export American LNG to countries without free trade agreements.
- **Emergency Approvals for Energy Projects:** Federal agencies were ordered to fast-track the identification, leasing, production, transportation, refining, and generation of domestic energy resources. This directive includes potential use of federal eminent domain authorities and the Defense Production Act.

3. Regulatory Changes Favoring Fossil Fuels

- **Environmental and Regulatory Adjustments:** Agencies were instructed to use emergency regulations and nationwide permits under the Clean Water Act and other statutes to accelerate energy development. Additionally, consultations under the Endangered Species Act were streamlined to prevent delays in energy projects.

4. Restrictions on Renewable Energy Development

- **Offshore Wind Leasing Moratorium:** A memorandum was issued to withdraw areas on the Outer Continental Shelf from offshore wind leasing, pending a federal review of leasing and permitting practices. This also halted new approvals for both onshore and offshore wind projects until environmental and economic assessments are completed.

5. Implementation of Broad Import Tariffs

- **Tariffs Affecting the Energy Sector:** President Trump announced sweeping import tariffs, including a baseline 10% tariff on all imports, with higher rates for specific countries. However, U.S. energy imports—such as oil, gas, and refined products—were exempted, a move intended to benefit domestic refiners and stabilize the market.

These actions mark a significant shift in U.S. energy policy, emphasizing fossil fuel development, deregulation, and protectionist trade measures while restricting renewable energy expansion.

These recent changes mean that some projects will be paused, shut down, or scrapped before they even begin—but new opportunities will emerge to take their place. Whether it's crude oil and NGL pipelines, solar farms, shovel-ready highway expansions, or towers for cellular antennas and electrical lines, the work will continue. Just two months ago, an associate of mine had several government-funded projects paused or canceled due to a regime change. This threw his entire crew into panic mode, uncertain where their next paychecks would come from. But instead of giving up or wallowing in self-pity, he took action—reaching out to private companies in the area that are launching new projects in response to the anticipated needs arising from President Trump's recent policy changes. And within a few weeks he was in negotiation for more work than what he had before.

As landmen, we must broaden our perspective to encompass the full scope of our profession. A shift in the wind doesn't have to stall our sails or sink our ship. By adapting and adjusting our course, we can navigate any changes brought by shifting government policies and continue moving forward, no matter what the political climate.