

The [Senate voted 51-49](#) Wednesday morning against considering a resolution to repeal Obama-era regulations targeting methane emissions from oil and gas operations on federal lands. The Senate was considering whether to vote on rolling back the rule under the Congressional Review Act, which allows the Senate to repeal rules within 60 days of enactment. Three Republicans voted against the resolution: Sens. John McCain of Arizona, Susan Collins of Maine, and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. It was already expected that Sen. Collins would not support the resolution, but also that the motion would still pass, possibly even through a tie-breaking vote from Vice President Pence.

This vote comes as a huge surprise to anyone who had been following the fate of the methane rule. The regulation, issued by the Bureau of Land Management, requires oil and gas companies operating on public lands to capture methane leaked from well sites and pipelines, gas that had previously simply been vented directly to the air or burned off, otherwise known as “flaring”. Several Democrats had refused to publicly commit to a position, including Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Sen. Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota, leading to speculation that they would side with Republicans. In the end, no Democrat voted in favor of the resolution. The linchpin vote appears to have been Sen. McCain, who is also [reported](#) to have met with the bill’s sponsor, Republican Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, late last night to tell him he’d changed his mind.

As to why Sen. McCain may have crossed party lines, and why Heitkamp and Manchin did not, that is still unclear. McCain indicated hesitation based on the particular restrictions on future rules imposed by use of the Congressional Review Act, which prohibits the Executive from simply issuing a slightly different rule. Heitkamp may have faced pressure from constituents – the opposition to repealing the rule from farmers and ranchers in states with a lot of energy development had been growing. Wells on public lands are often out of sight for most Americans, except the farmers and ranchers living alongside them.

This is extremely good news. Methane gas is 25-40 times more potent than carbon dioxide in its warming potential, depending on the time horizon assumed. As a result, a small rate of methane emissions can have major implications for the climate. Preventing the unnecessary and wasteful release of pure methane from oil and gas drilling and processing equipment not only reduces those emissions, but also saves the taxpayer money in unpaid royalties. Given all the insanity coming out of Washington recently, this vote is a refreshing breath of common sense.