

Candidate says drilling may have place in Wyoming Range

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JACKSON (AP) -- U.S. House hopeful Bill Winney says he's not convinced that prohibiting further oil and gas drilling in the Wyoming Range would be a good idea.

U.S. Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., is sponsoring a bill to limit additional oil and gas leasing in the Wyoming Range. But Winney said he's not sure that the Wyoming Range is worthy of complete protection.

Winney is a Republican candidate for the House seat that is opening up with Rep. Barbara Cubin's planned retirement.

Many Wyoming hunters and fishermen support protecting the Wyoming Range in far western Wyoming, and Winney lives in a subdivision south of Jackson that is part of a plan for natural gas development.

"I'm not all that enthralled with looking out the back window and seeing oil wells near my house," Winney said in Jackson last week. "But there is another piece to it."

He said the nation's economic strength depends on its energy supply -- particularly energy sources within the nation's borders. Also, Winney said that while he supports preservation of natural "crown jewels," he isn't convinced that the Wyoming Range fits that category.

"There are places where we should not do drilling, like Yellowstone," he said. "But there are places we can and should be able to go into and extract resources and minimize our footprint."

Winney said the energy industry should be required to use the least intrusive drilling methods available.

"It's always least expensive for industry to put in one well, go over another 100 yards and put in another one -- that is not what I am talking about," he said. "Industry can and should be required to drill multiple wells from the same pad."

Winney didn't rule out supporting the Wyoming Range bill, but said he would like to discuss the bill with Barrasso before making a final decision on it.

Other Republicans who have declared their candidacy for the House include former State Treasurer Cynthia Lummis, rancher Mark Gordon, state Rep. Dan Zwonitzer and inspirational speaker Swede Nelson. Businessman Gary Trauner is running for the seat as a Democrat.