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SSDA-AT Supports ADAS Functionality and Integrity Act

By Roy Littlefield

Vehicle technology is advancing quickly, but SSDA-AT is stressing that one principle must remain unchanged: vehicle owners' right to repair, maintain, and modify their vehicles.

That position is central to SSDA-AT's support for the bipartisan ADAS Functionality and Integrity Act, which is gaining momentum in Congress as policymakers address the growing complexity of modern vehicle safety systems.

Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS)—now standard on most new vehicles—include features such as automatic emergency braking, lane departure warning, adaptive cruise control, and blind spot monitoring. These systems depend on cameras, radar, and software that can be easily affected by routine repairs or modifications.

SSDA-AT notes that services such as tire changes, suspension work, lift kits, windshield replacement, and collision repairs can all impact ADAS calibration, yet independent repair shops often lack clear, consistent manufacturer guidance on how to ensure systems continue functioning properly.

The legislation would require clearer federal guidance on how repairs and modifications affect ADAS-equipped vehicles, while preserving consumers' ability to customize their vehicles safely and responsibly.

SSDA-AT says the bill's recent progress in Congress is an important step forward for both road safety and the right-to-modify movement, reinforcing that innovation and consumer choice can coexist.

The Power of Digital Advertising

The reason that digital advertising is so important is that search engines are where almost every customer buying journey begins. Every day Google gets 3.5-billion searches, Bing gets nearly 875-million, and Yahoo gets another 585-million search queries. That equates to a combined total of almost 5-billion daily searches. Yet despite the volume, the oldest joke in digital marketing is "The best place to hide a dead body is on the second page of Google" because 60% of traffic goes to the top three listings and less than 10% of all searchers will ever go to the second page.

Research has also shown that if a user cannot find what they are looking for on the very top of the first page of search results they will enter a new, different set of search terms rather than drill down into the initial results. Most importantly, 97% of online users perform a search to find local businesses like yours.

Paid digital advertising is a marketing method where companies pay a "publisher" - such as a search engine provider or website owner or a social media platform - each time someone views or clicks on one of their ads. Essentially, companies use the paid ads or keywords to "buy" visits to their site rather than earning them organically over time. Different companies will bid for the ad space or a specific keyword in a search, the publisher accepts the highest bid, and then places the ad at the top of the page where it has maximum visibility and the greatest chance of being clicked on. Enough click-throughs and the resulting jump in traffic will help turn the purchaser's website into a highly ranked destination by Google and the other big search engines. At the end of the day, it's a basic equation: Spend enough, place a solid ad, and you will get top placement on page one in a search.

That's why you need to have a clear paid advertising strategy for your business and a solid approach is to develop one that covers the big three pillars of online ads: Search, social, and display. Although they are all similar in some ways, they all have different advantages and can reach different audiences, so let's break them down.

SEARCH ADVERTISING BASICS: SEO, SEM, AND DISPLAY ADS

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) "organically" increases your platform visibility on search engines such as Google or Yahoo and drives more traffic to your dealership's website. Organic (non-paid) search results are ranked by the quality and content of the web page and make up most of the content you see after a search. To rank at the top of this section, your landing page needs to be relevant for the searcher and needs to have a high click-through rate. SEO makes up around one-third of all traffic to company websites and accounts for more traffic than paid and social put together, but it takes time and expertise to build. Successful SEO requires extensive knowledge of how search engines work and takes time and practice to get right because it is a moving target. For example, search engine algorithms on Google alone are updated as many as 500 to 600 times a year and requires constant monitoring and modifications to be effective.

To accelerate the ability for your business to be quickly found in web searching, you'll need to use paid Search Engine Marketing (SEM). SEM is used to describe online searches that begin by clicking through on a paid ad.

Some of the most common terms used to define to SEM activities include:

Paid Search Advertising: Short, text-based ads that are placed on search engines like Google, Yahoo, Bing, and appear at the top right-hand side of the page when search results are displayed

Pay-Per-Click (PPC): The pricing model for what you will pay if someone clicks on your ad and goes to your website or landing page. These ads appear in the top search engine slots and direct searchers directly to the page you want them to land on

Cost-Per-Click (CPC): The fee you pay when a user clicks on your ad to visit your website or landing page

Cost-Per-Thousand Impressions (CPM): Most search ads are sold on a CPC / PPC basis, but some advertising options may also be sold on a CPM basis

Display Ads: A step up from standard PPC text-based ads, this approach uses either static or dynamic images (e.g. banners, videos, audio, or polling formats) that offer a more engaging experience that helps capture the attention of your target audience and drive conversion

SEM effectively turbocharges your online marketing because paid search ads drive traffic directly to your website or straight to your service and inventory pages. The most common form of this is the Pay-Per-Click (PPC) model. On one level, paid search ads are simple. If you are a tire dealer and a big winter storm is forecast for your area, you absolutely want to advertise your invento-

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NET DRIVEN

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ry on Google. When someone searches for keywords you bid on, like "studded tires" or "best winter tire," their search term will trigger your text ad. Your ad will show up in the sponsored section of the search results at the top of the page just to the right of all the organic entries.

You can also use PPC to target searchers based on their geography with search ads, so it's only shown to people in your local area. It's a great way to compete in your industry and target local audiences and people who are already looking for your services. This is a cost-effective approach to getting visibility quickly and may not be as expensive as you'd think. A recent review of Google AdWords pricing shows that the minimum bid per keyword is only 5-cents, while the most expensive keywords (like "insurance" or "loans") can range up to $670 per click!

Beyond text ads, you can also use PPC strategies with "Display" ads. Display advertising is a way to grow your brand's awareness online and are targeted based on user activity. Display ads (often banner ads or "rich media" formats like video or audio) are shown to your target audience when they are browsing the Internet. With a 90% reach across all Internet users worldwide, Google's display network is the largest in the world and reaches more than 2-million sites and more than 650,000 mobile apps.

Effective display formats include:

Static Banner Ads: A banner is a simple image ad that is served onto a web page. Static banner ads typically consist of a single image file with no audio, video or additional features

Animated Ads: Animated ads are a cut above static banner ads when it comes to capturing the attention of the target audience. Animation creates movement that naturally catches the eye and works against what is known as "banner blindness," prompting target audiences to investigate your message

Video Ads: While video ads are primarily served through video content platforms like Netflix and YouTube, they can also be distributed through display ad networks like Google. The great thing about video advertising today is that almost everybody has access to a mobile phone with reasonably high-quality video capabilities and consumers love them!

Display ads are powerful tools, but require advanced audience targeting and the creative ability to build a dynamic web-based ad. To maximize your dealership's success online, you need to develop a strategy that blends both PPC and Display formats

FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM MARKETING

Facebook has a huge audience - a staggering 2.4 billion people use it every month! But beyond keeping connected with friends and family, people are increasingly using Facebook to connect with businesses of all sizes. The company recently reported that two-thirds of its users say they visit a local business's Facebook Page at least once a week. Potential customers are already looking for businesses like your dealership on Facebook and having a clear, focused Facebook marketing strategy is the only way to tap into this existing audience.

Here are six ways you can significantly boost your dealership's advertising reach through Facebook:

News Feed Ads: Cost-effective ads that target unique audiences and can track traffic and conversion on your website

Conversion Ads: Target and deliver certain actions such as "Request a demo" or "Take a test drive"

Carousel Ads: Feature several rotating images in a single ad to display different models and feature packages

Engagement Ads: Best used to drive "likes" and comments on your ads, increasing validation and visibility

Lead Generation Ads: Allow users to fill out lead forms on their own Facebook wall without going to your website

Remarketing Ads: Connect your website inventory feed to Facebook, then advertise to past visitors with ads customized to highlight the products and services they viewed

Facebook's high traffic flow and wide range of ad mediums offer several ways to enhance your brand. It also allows you to promote products and services through social experiences that can drive loyalty and help create the most powerful type of marketing – word of mouth referrals.

https://www.thebalance.com/reasons-small-business-website-2948414

US Plan for Mineral Pricing Meets Resistance from G7

The Trump administration's proposal to regulate critical mineral prices to reduce reliance on China is facing skepticism from G7 allies and the mining industry.

The plan aims to create a Western trading bloc with price supports and subsidies, but European officials are concerned about financial burdens and the plan's transparency. France and Canada prefer a multilateral framework, while the US favors bilateral agreements, starting with Japan and the EU.

USMCA Faces Uncertainty as Trump Opts Against Extension

President Trump has announced that the United States will not renew the USMCA, the trade agreement with Canada and Mexico, for another 16 years.

Instead, the agreement will enter annual reviews, continuing for up to 10 years.

US Proposes to Slash Costs for Energy Drillers on Federal Lands, Reuters

The Trump administration proposed looser rules for oil and gas drilling operations on federal lands, including a dramatic cut to clean-up costs for abandoned wells.

The moves are aligned with President Donald Trump's goal to reduce regulations for businesses and make it easier to invest in production of domestic fossil fuels.

"These targeted updates cut through the red tape that has historically deterred investment, ensuring our public lands remain a reliable engine for economic growth and innovation," Interior Secretary Doug Burgum said in a statement.

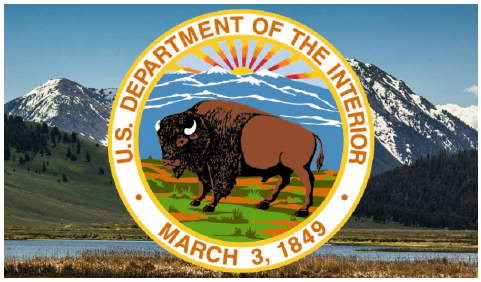
The Department of the Interior said it would lower the cost of statewide bonds for wells to $25,000 per state from $500,000, a level implemented during the Biden era.

Bonds cover the costs of plugging abandoned oil and gas wells if an oil and gas company goes out of business. An analysis by non-profit Resources for the Future in 2021 estimated it costs about $20,000 to plug a single oil and gas well.

Interior's other proposals include shortening public participation in oil and gas permitting to 10 days from 90 days.

The agency is also proposing to roll back requirements aimed at curtailing methane emissions from oil and gas operations. The changes would cut compliance costs by nearly $17 million a year, Interior said.

Methane is a potent greenhouse gas that tends to leak from drill sites and pipelines.



U.S. Releases More Funding to Tackle Growing Inventory of Abandoned Oil and Gas Wells, S&P Global

More federal dollars have been released to help US states tackle abandoned and methane-leaking oil and gas wells as operators continue to leave unsealed drill holes behind.

The US Department of the Interior announced in late May it had "unlocked" additional funding allocated under the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to help plug and remediate such well sites, with $2 billion now available for state grants. The belated funding, while welcome, will not come close to solving what has become a growing headache for oil-rich states, experts agree.

"Decommissioning wells and well sites is fundamentally burying money in the ground," said Dwayne Purvis, a former oil industry executive who now consults with operators. "You're doing work to create value that doesn't earn a return. It benefits other people."

While most companies responsibly close their wells, companies that go bankrupt or lack decommissioning funds often abandon depleted or uneconomic sites, Purvis said in an interview. The result is a backlog that falls on states and taxpayers.

States struggle to keep up

As of May 22, Texas regulators listed a record 12,345 orphaned oil and gas wells in the state's inventory, up from 11,000 in late 2025 despite dozens of wells getting plugged every month. Texas received $79.7 million in federal funding to cap abandoned wells and expects to receive nearly $319 million over the life of the program.

Ohio added 921 orphaned wells in 2025 to reach 2,533. The state sealed 480 wells that year, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. After receiving a $25 million initial federal grant in 2022, the state recently applied for another $30 million in matching grant funding released May 29.

Louisiana had identified 4,600 orphaned wells in 2022 when it received an initial federal grant from Interior in 2022 and then capped nearly 600 wells using that money over the following two years, Patrick Courreges, press secretary for the Louisiana Department of Conservation and Energy, said in an email.

Like other states, however, Louisiana faces an uphill battle. The state saw another 1,128 wells "orphaned" in 2025, the largest annual increase in state history, according to the coastal advocacy group Healthy Gulf. The rise was driven mainly by two oil company bankruptcies in recent years, Scott Eustis, the group's community science director, said in an interview.

In late May, the state reached an

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agreement in principle with Exxon Mobil to close orphaned wells along the coast as part of a deal to resolve local climate lawsuits over Louisiana's eroding coastline. The settlement followed a US Supreme Court ruling allowing Chevron to transfer a similar case from state to federal court — where local lawsuits are often less likely to prevail.

A spokesperson for Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill said there are no details on the coastal orphaned well projects because the agreement is still being drawn up.

Investments needed

The Trump administration initially froze the money Congress allocated under the 2021 infrastructure law for state orphan well cleanup projects and has been slow to release it. At least one program, known as Regulatory Improvement Grants, has yet to resume.

Those grants worth $700 million were earmarked for states to improve well-plugging standards to ensure wells are appropriately capped to protect groundwater and other natural resources, and to strengthen state programs.

Interior said the regulatory improvement grants "have not yet been advertised and are still under consideration by the department."

"My guess is that they don't want to manage any changes that states must make to receive these funds, such as better plugging standards or policies that have lowered orphan well burdens," Ted Boettner, a senior researcher with the nonprofit Ohio River Valley Institute, said in an email.

In Texas, state regulators are hearing from landowners and other state residents about abandoned wells that leak pollution and present other hazards, Purvis said.

In an effort to speed up the work, the Texas legislature in 2025 passed a bipartisan law requiring companies to plug depleted wells within 15 years. There was previously no deadline. It also allocated $100 million from its general fund to boost the Texas state program.

The average cost of capping a well is about $150,000, but costs can range from $75,000 to $750,000 depending on location, access and the complexity of the well, according to the Well Done Foundation.

The nonprofit has plugged more than 120 orphaned wells nationwide since 2019, and is now operating in 15 states, according to Dave Tragethon, a foundation spokesperson. So far, those projects have kept more than 5 million metric tons of CO_2 equivalent emissions out of the atmosphere, he said in an email.

Montana Judge Tosses 1.5M Acres Of Wyoming Oil And Gas Leases, Costs State $50M, Cowboy State Daily

A federal judge in Montana has thrown out more than 1.5 million acres of Wyoming oil and gas leases sold under the Trump administration, a sweeping ruling that Wyoming attorneys said will force the state to return $50 million in payments and imperil $180 million in future revenue for schools and other public services.

The ruling also affects an additional 185,000 acres of oil and gas leases in Montana and the Dakotas.

The decision, issued by Chief Judge Brian Morris out of the U.S. District Court of Montana on June 12, is sparking outrage in the oil and gas community. It's the third time Morris, an Obama appointee, has ruled against the U.S. Department of the Interior over the protection of sage-grouse habitat.

"The environmental group found a sympathetic venue in Montana to file their case and ultimately hurt Wyoming," oil and gas landman Steve Degenfelder told Cowboy State Daily. "I am hopeful the State of Wyoming will appeal this decision with everything they have. Other than a successful appeal, it's my understanding we would need an act of Congress to overturn this injustice. I wonder how Montana would feel if a Wyoming judge hurt their state to this magnitude?"

Ryan McConnaughey, with the Petroleum Association of Wyoming, said it's just the latest example of how activists are misusing the judicial system to attack industries they dislike.

"Anti-oil and natural gas activists have a sympathetic ear in Montana, which is why they continuously file cases there," he told Cowboy State Daily. "The hard truth is that until Congress steps in to restore the original intent of laws like NEPA and the Endangered Species Act, every land management decision will be decided out of public view by the courts. It's further proof that permitting reform is absolutely necessary if the United States wants to be a country that harvests energy and builds things again."

Wyoming's Bureau of Land Management office referred Cowboy State Daily for comment about the case to Montana's office, which did not respond.

It was not known whether BLM will appeal the case, or what its next step will be for the leases.

The Wyoming Attorney General's Office was also consulted, but had not responded at the time this story was posted.

At the heart of the case brought by the Montana Wildlife Federation, The Wilderness Society, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation and Montana Audubon is how the BLM applied its 2015 sage-grouse conservation plans in Wyoming.

The groups argued that leasing should have been steered first to areas outside of key habitat so the bird would stay off the federal endangered species list.

The 2015 sage-grouse plan required the agency to "prioritize" oil and gas leasing and development outside of sensitive habitat, particularly in designated priority areas.

But, in 2018, the BLM issued a new instruction memorandum that effectively told staff to disregard those prioritization requirements when offering new "fluid mineral" leases in sage-grouse country.

Wyoming has a voluntary sage-grouse protection plan, one that guides development away from those areas without any prioritization on BLM's part, Wyoming attorneys argued.

However, the judge ruled that the prioritization error "infected everything" that followed, making it infeasible for BLM to keep the current leases in place.

BLM offered about 1.25 million acres of oil and gas leases in Wyoming in 2019 alone, roughly 785,000 acres in its February 2019 sale and more than 493,000 acres combined in the September and December 2019 sales.

Altogether the June 12 order affects about 1.5 million acres of Wyoming leases sold between December

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2017 and December 2019. December 2020 sales were excluded because the judge found that no final agency action yet exists to vacate or remand those sales.

In court filings, Wyoming attorneys laid out what the revenue losses will mean to local and state governments providing public services.

Federal defendants estimated that vacating Phase Three leases will require the return of more than $50 million in revenue that has already been allocated and spent. The state would also lose future severance, ad valorem, and conservation taxes on the leases, totaling at least $180 million over the life of the wells.

Funding cuts due to losing these revenues will affect a range of public services in Wyoming, from employment, roads, IT, fire personnel, hospitals and other daily operations, Wyoming's lawyers argued, and should prompt the court to remand without vacating the leases.

In Campbell County, for example, oil and gas revenues help fund the senior center, homeless shelter and soup kitchen, domestic violence shelter, youth crisis and treatment home, and the Boys and Girls Club.

In Converse County, half the annual budget relies on oil and gas revenue, which helps fund senior services, the Humane Society, a youth crisis center, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Douglas and Glenrock, a domestic violence and sexual assault survivors crisis center and shelter, a mental health crisis and intervention center, and more.

Wyoming attorneys also argued that the state is already protecting sage-grouse habitat — so well that it was praised by the Obama administration at the time.

Since 2008, federal oil and gas leases in core sage-grouse habitat have declined 63%, Wyoming's attorneys wrote, and reduced production in those areas by 48%.

The state's plan has also reshaped development, Wyoming contended.

"From 2006 to 2012, vertically drilled well permits declined 65%, while directionally and horizontally drilled wells from outside core areas increased by 66% and 1,337%," the attorneys wrote. "The trend continues with 95% of wells drilled in Wyoming from 2020 to 2024 being directional or horizontal, reducing sage-grouse disturbance."

Horizontal wells disturb up to 3.5 acres, compared with 19 acres for vertical wells.

"Thus, deferrals are not needed to guide development away from sage-grouse habitat," the attorneys wrote. "In sum, the state's strategy — adopted by BLM — has shifted development away from sage-grouse habitat and changed development patterns to meaningfully reduce impacts."

Drilling in lower conflict areas is already preferred through the state's sage-grouse mitigation plan, which protects habitat while allowing economic opportunities, they said.

The judge in the case acknowledged disruptive economic impacts caused by vacating the lease sales, but concluded that BLM's legal violations outweighed those considerations except in cases where a lease was already producing oil and gas.

Wyoming, Jonah Energy, and Continental Resources, which intervened in the case, argued that the judge should carve out an exception for leases for wells that have already been drilled and completed.

Jonah Energy told the court it had already spent $68 million developing its leases. Continental said it had spent more than $97.6 million for nine producing wells.

"The considerations of equity require that the court not vacate the nine already producing leases stemming from the challenged Phase Three lease sales," Morris agreed, likening the situation to a scrambled egg that can't be put back into its shell. "Vacatur as to the producing leases could not restore the leases to the pre-leasing condition without further disruption."

Chevron to Fuel Massive Microsoft Data Center in Texas Using Natural Gas, CNBC

Chevron will fuel a massive Microsoft data center in West Texas with natural gas under a 20-year agreement, the oil major announced.

The data center, called Project Kilby, is expected to consume nearly 2.7 gigawatts of electricity, equivalent to the power needed to run about 2 million homes.

Most of the electricity will come from large gas turbines supplied by Chevron's partner, GE Vernova. Caterpillar will also provide turbines. The power is dedicated to the data center and will not be connected to the electric grid.

"There's really no competition with local electricity consumers," Jeff Gustavson, president of Chevron new energies, told CNBC. "In fact, over time, as we have excess power, we plan to push that into the grid to help stabilize it."

Project Kilby has not started construction in Reeves County yet. Chevron expects to make a final investment decision on the project later this year. The data center would start receiving power in 2028.

Microsoft's partnership with Chevron comes as it undertakes a massive buildout of data centers to power artificial intelligence applications. It plans $190 billion in capital expenditures this year, 61% more than in 2025.

Microsoft's embrace of natural gas through a partnership with the oil industry shows a willingness to invest in fossil fuels to meet its electricity needs.

The rapid growth of AI "requires energy infrastructure that can scale quickly and reliably," Noelle Walsh, Microsoft's president of cloud operations and innovation, said in a statement.

For its part, Chevron is positioned to quickly and reliably deliver natural gas from the Permian Basin, located in West Texas and southeastern New Mexico, to data centers at a competitive cost, Gustavson said in a statement.

Microsoft has invested primarily in renewable energy to offset carbon-dioxide emissions from its data centers. But now it's also searching for alternative power sources than can more reliably meet the 24/7 demand of its data centers. It turned, for example, to nuclear power in 2024 by investing in the restart of the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania.

Fracking Saved the U.S. Economy By: Stephen Moore

It is hard to believe that just a decade ago, there was a massive backlash against fracking.

This was the technology pioneered by drillers such as Harold Hamm of Continental Resources, which unlocked access to billions of barrels of oil and natural gas trapped in thick shale rock formations.

The technology, along with horizontal drilling, revolutionized drilling and turned America into an energy powerhouse again almost overnight.

Thanks to the shale oil revolution, the United States tripled its oil output in less than 15 years, even as the Malthusian doomsayers (and then President Obama) were assuring us that we would soon be drilling the last barrel of oil on American soil.

Shale gas also helped break the back of the OPEC cartel, which, for nearly half a century, had a knife at the neck of the U.S. economy and could, by turning off the spigots, plunge the U.S. economy into a recession.

Now a study shows that fracking shale oil and gas have made America rich.

The University of California, Berkeley's Energy Institute at Haas — hardly a right-wing source — has released blockbuster findings on the shale gas revolution: "It may seem like a distant memory now, but as of the mid-2000s, U.S. natural gas production had been flat for a decade, and the U.S. was importing liquefied natural gas (LNG), with plans to import much more. Then shale gas happened. Advances in hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling caused U.S. natural gas production to increase significantly, and the U.S. went from being a net importer of natural gas to being the world's largest exporter. We calculate that U.S. natural gas consumers have saved $3.1-$4.3 trillion between 2007 and 2025, equivalent to $164-$227 billion annually."

That is just from the natural gas. The oil has driven up gross domestic product by hundreds of billions of dollars more.

Kathleen Hartnett White and I were sharply criticized for writing, in our 2016 book, "Fueling Freedom," that the shale oil and gas revolution would be "the energy policy equivalent to curing cancer."

Back then, critics warned that fracking could cause cancer — and earthquakes, toxic drinking water and floods from rising oceans. This study's findings of trillions of dollars of benefits from fracking and horizontal drilling are sweet vindication.

The good news is that shale drilling technology keeps improving faster than the pace at which we are extracting oil and gas.

That means we are looking at another century of bountiful oil and gas.

There are multiple lessons here for policymakers. One is that new technologies are often met with scare tactics to stop their adoption. Fracking was said to pollute the drinking water and cause cancer, earthquakes and other horrors.

These risks were highly exaggerated, as we now know.

We are hearing very similar complaints today about the dangers of data centers and artificial intelligence. Those concerns should be taken seriously, but myth must be separated from reality.

It is human nature to fear the unknown and radical change, but leaps of technological progress — fracking, the internet, robotics, bioengineering, space travel, etc. — are the next frontiers of human flourishing.

If fracking had been banned by the doom-and-gloom industry, which called it a poison, we would be trillions of dollars poorer today. We would be paying closer to $10 a gallon for gas, and the Saudis and Russians would be laughing all the way to the bank.

US, Mexican Officials to Discuss Agriculture, Energy as Trump Casts Doubt on Trade Deal, Reuters

U.S. and Mexican negotiators meet in Washington or a second round of talks focused on agriculture and energy in an effort to revamp the North American trade agreement, as President Donald Trump casts doubt on the future of a 32-year-old free trade zone that also includes Canada.

Agricultural groups are urging Trump to extend the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement on trade for another 16 years with duty-free farm products, strengthened provisions for genetically modified corn and ethanol access in Mexico and improved access to Canada's largely closed dairy market.

The closed-door talks will take place following negotiations last month in Mexico City that revealed an expansive U.S. demand to require 50% of North American motor vehicle content come specifically from the U.S., pushing up the regional threshold to 82%.

Canada has so far been shut out of formal negotiations, although its trade minister, Dominic LeBlanc, continues to meet with U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.

"I'm not looking to renew it," Trump said of USMCA. "We don't need anything that Canada has. We don't need anything that Mexico has, but they need everything that we have. They have to treat us better."

It was unclear whether Trump's remarks were a negotiating tactic aimed at extracting more concessions, but he has frequently expressed frustration with the trade pact that he signed in 2020 to replace the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement - particularly in the face of persistent U.S. goods trade deficits with its two largest trading partners.

The three countries on July 1 need to decide whether to extend the pact as is or recommend changes, but revisions will not be negotiated in time for that deadline. Instead, July 1 is expected to start a clock for termination of USMCA in 10 years, during which time negotiations would continue.

The U.S. and Mexico have scheduled a third round of talks in Mexico City for the week of July 20.

Kevin Brady, a former Texas congressman who once chaired the powerful U.S. House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee, said Greer has a difficult task extracting enough concessions to keep Trump interested in USMCA while preserving as much of the duty-free structure that underpins the North American economy and nearly $1.6 trillion in annual regional trade.

"It's a bit of a Texas two-step," said Brady, who is now lobbying on behalf of USMCA at law firm Akin Gump. "You know, Ambassador Greer's got to negotiate an agreement that's in the U.S. interest all the way, and the second step is he's got to convince the president to sign it."

Trump has already modified the trade pact by imposing unilateral tariffs on Mexican and Canadian autos, steel and aluminum, and Greer has said that duties will remain, but perhaps at lower rates.

While Mexico and Canada could try to drag the negotiations out for years, trade experts say such a move could prompt Trump to invoke a separate termination clause allowing any member country to leave the pact six months after written notice.

Pentagon Offers $1.25 Billion in Loans for Rare Earth Processing Plants, C&EN

The US Department of Defense is offering $1.25 billion in conditional loans to support the construction of rare earth processing facilities in the US.

Phoenix Tailings is set to receive a $500 million loan for a facility that would produce rare earth metals. Energy Fuels is in line for $725 million to help scale up rare earth oxide separation and metallization. The Pentagon hopes the facilities will reduce US dependence on China for the critical minerals.

Rare earth elements are needed for magnets used in defense applications such as jet engines, electric drone motors, and radar systems. To make them, mixtures of rare earths from mined ore must be separated into individual oxides and reduced to metals. The metals are then alloyed with other, more readily available metals to form magnets.

About 90% of separation and metallization steps are carried out in China, according to a 2022 US Department of Commerce Report (PDF). Over the past year, China has implemented several restrictions that have slowed exports of rare earth products, sparking national security concerns in the US.

The US has been throwing significant support behind new rare earth processing projects to ensure that the country's military and technology industries have access to the materials. That support includes an investment in the California-based rare earth miner MP Materials, a $1.3 billion loan for USA Rare Earth, and a supply agreement with Lynas Rare Earths, which has a mine in Australia and a separation plant in Malaysia.

Plans for rare earth metallization projects outside of China are also moving forward. The USA Rare Earth subsidiary Less Common Metals is planning a metallization facility in France, and Australian Strategic Materials operates one in South Korea.

Last year, Phoenix Tailings opened a metallization facility in Exeter, Massachusetts, designed to produce 200 metric tons (t) per year of neodymium-praseodymium metals and dysprosium-iron alloys. The company has said it could scale up to more than 1,000 t per year, enough for all US defense applications. Phoenix Tailings hopes to expand production to include rare earths such as terbium, samarium, and gadolinium. Phoenix Tailings is also developing technology to separate mixtures of rare earths into oxides.

The new facility supported by the Department of Defense is expected to cost about $1 billion; the additional funding will come from private sources. Phoenix Tailings says the facility will be able to process a variety of rare earth feedstocks, including mined ore, manufacturing scrap, and recycled magnets into oxides and metals. It is slated to open in 2028.

Energy Fuels uses solvent extraction to produce uranium in San Juan County, Utah, and is developing a similar process for rare earth separation. Energy Fuels plans to extract the rare earths from monazite. The mineral has posed a challenge for other rare earth miners because it contains uranium and thorium, but Energy Fuels argues that it has the infrastructure and capabilities to handle radioactive by-products.

In January, Energy Fuels announced plans to acquire the metallization specialist Australian Strategic Minerals. The company says part of the Department of Defense loan will be used to open a metallization facility in the US. Both Energy Fuels and Phoenix Tailings must fulfill some financial and technical due diligence requirements to close the loans.

David Riley, a rare earth industry analyst with the intelligence firm Wood Mackenzie, says it will be tough for firms to scale up both rare earth separation and metallization technologies at the same time.

Energy Fuels only recently started moving into the rare earth industry and has yet to complete the acquisition of Australian Strategic Minerals. Riley says Phoenix Tailings' Massachusetts facility demonstrates that the firm has the technical capability to reduce oxides into metals, but its separation technology appears to be less mature. Dealing with a wide range of feedstocks will add to the complexity, Riley notes.

"The project looks challenging," he says. "It's a lot of different elements to scale up together."

FERC Acts to Force US Markets to Protect Electricity Ratepayers, E&E news

Federal regulators initiated a sweeping investigation into the way power grids and utility companies are dividing up the huge costs of delivering electricity to America's data centers.

The five-member Federal Energy Regulatory Commission directed regional electricity grids serving nearly two-thirds of the country to show that the rates and conditions that apply to big data center connections are "just and reasonable" — or face federal fixes.

"Today we're taking historic action to push our country's electric markets and economy into the future," said FERC Chair Laura Swett.

"We are simultaneously protecting customers and giving the states what we've heard they want," Swett said. "Each market must show that it has adequate safeguards against cost shifting or take steps to create them."

FERC is wading into questions that have loomed over the build-out of data centers across the U.S., including who pays for multibillion-dollar grid upgrades, how quickly tech companies can tie onto the grid and the role of the federal government over a process traditionally left to state regulators.

Since October, the commission's wrestled with a request from Energy Secretary Chris Wright to assert power over the interconnection process. In doing so, FERC would have to push the limits of its jurisdiction under the law and by tradition — setting off a potential fight with state regulators.

Under the order, FERC chose not to deliver a nationwide approach to interconnecting so-called large loads to the grid. Instead, it is giving the organized power markets a few months to show they can get data centers onto their sprawling interstate grids in a timely way or enable data centers to co-locate with existing or future power generation.

The commission is steering clear of the closely guarded domain of state regulators to set retail utility rates. But FERC ordered regional transmission organizations and independent system operators under its jurisdiction to show that agreements with data centers keep those high costs of accessing the nation's biggest, most reliable power systems from finding their way onto people's electricity bills.

The stakes have always been high for Google, Amazon and other tech giants betting on the future of artificial intelligence. To make it all work long term, data centers need access to the high-voltage power grid.

"FERC's actions today are a win for ratepayers, grid reliability, and American competitiveness," said a statement from Nvidia, the largest AI chip maker in the world. "By speeding the integration of large energy customers, FERC ensures these new loads help shoulder infrastructure costs, lowering rates for everyone while bringing new generation online alongside new demand."

Today's FERC orders come as tech companies and utilities working with the major power markets spend billions of dollars to add more power generation and transmission to meet unprecedented demands from AI and electrification across the U.S. economy.

And it comes as bipartisan leaders from President Donald Trump to Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro and state and federal lawmakers push for more protections for utility ratepayers. Data centers that require enough electricity to power a city have triggered a public backlash, partly the result of double-digit increases to people's utility bills starting last summer.

FERC issued six "show-cause" orders today targeting the organized power markets: PJM Interconnection, Southwest Power Pool, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, the California ISO, ISO New England and the New York ISO. The orders don't include the rapidly growing data center hub of Texas, which operates a grid outside of federal jurisdiction.

"By building on regional and state processes that are already driving progress, the commission is advancing our shared goals while supporting flexibility and innovation," said a statement from the Edison Electric Institute, which represents investor-owned utility companies.

"We see FERC's reforms as accelerating data center study timelines and offering new flexible (less expansive) transmission interconnection pathways — both actions benefit the speed-to-power push," John Miller, an analyst for TD Cowen, said in a note to clients after the FERC orders. "In pivoting from the slower rulemaking process to a series of ISO/RTO-specific 'show cause' orders, FERC has accelerated the timeline in which reforms can be deployed."

The commission has broad reach under the Federal Power Act to respond to problems in interstate power markets. FERC can be prescriptive when it's deemed necessary to protect ratepayers from unfair transmission costs. But broad, assertive action out of Washington also invites litigation if it encroaches on state regulators whose role is to keep local utility rates under control.

"The design seems to target the core challenges on a region by region basis on a tight timeline," said former FERC Chair Neil Chatterjee, a Republican. "Faster and likely more legally defensible than a rule but seems to pursue the same desired outcome."

Robert Gramlich, president of the consulting firm Grid Strategies, noted that FERC deviated from the approach that Wright wanted to take — a rule that would push deeper into the states' retail rate-setting terrain. Instead, Gramlich said, the commission went right up to the line of its jurisdiction.

Opinion: 7 Ways to Build Leadership Awareness and Adaptability, Smart Brief

Adaptability is the most important skill of the future. Today's world of work is unpredictable. Shifts in the market, technology and international politics are just some of the factors that can change priorities on any given day. Being able to adapt to these circumstances and maintain momentum is becoming a key differentiator for individuals and organizations that are able to get ahead. In fact, adaptability is becoming such a focus of development that we're even seeing the term AQ (adaptability quotient) pop up as something people can assess alongside IQ (intelligence quotient) and EQ (emotional quotient).

However, adaptability is only half of the equation. Adaptability is useless unless it is paired with awareness. Awareness enables you to understand that the situation has shifted and to recognize the most important factors at play. It enables leaders to recognize early changes in performance, misalignment and disengagement, so they can adapt their approach to address them.

The need for adaptability and awareness isn't limited to formal leadership roles. As organizations flatten, it's critical that everyone is equipped to examine and adjust their approach to the changing circumstances they face. Even without a title, we are all given opportunities to lead and influence others through our actions and decisions.

Here are seven ways to build leadership awareness and adaptability at every level of the organization so that every team member can approach situations with curiosity and confidence.

1. Practice observation

We typically observe passively. However, if you're looking to improve your awareness, the first step is to make a conscious effort to observe your surroundings. Look for how people respond to changing circumstances and how those responses might shift their ability or willingness. Catching these changes early lets you adapt your leadership style to address their performance needs.

2. Focus on alignment

Misalignment can be the biggest killer of success and engagement in an organization. That's why it's important to recognize when circumstances, goals or expectations have shifted and instead of assuming alignment, check in with your people. Let them know how you're seeing the situation and how it will impact what you do moving forward. Allow them to respond and pay close attention to any differences between your interpretation of the situation and theirs.

3. Ask questions

Leading with curiosity is a cultural shift within an organization that empowers people to face uncertainty head-on. You can do this by asking questions. Ask senior leadership or the C-suite questions about the decisions they make, their priorities and how you and your team can be successful. Ask your team members questions about their performance, their engagement and what they need to build those. This invites reflection and ownership rather than simply giving them direction.

4. Empathize with others

Asking questions must be followed with empathy. Don't jump to judgment when your team members are uncertain about a change you're excited for. Buy-in looks different for

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everyone and can take time. Regardless of their starting point, responding with empathy creates psychological safety and encourages them to share more about what specifically might be affecting their willingness or confidence.

5. Build trust

Demonstrating empathy is one way you can build trust among your team members. Other ways to build trust include keeping confidences, building strong working relationships and holding people accountable, including yourself. Trust isn't built overnight. It takes a long time to earn. But it pays off in dividends. Building trust gives people the confidence to take risks and stretch and grow. It creates loyalty and encourages people to bring their best selves to work.

6. Remain flexible

Adaptability is all about remaining flexible. This means adjusting your leadership approach as the situation changes. Your team members' performance will always be in flux, and you need to be able to meet them where they're at in that current moment. In some cases, that means showing up with a more supportive approach, focusing on collaborative problem-solving while empowering them to make the final decision. In other cases, you will need to be more directive, providing clear, step-by-step instructions and examples of "what good looks like."

7. Lead with intention

Throughout all of this, you must always lead with intention. That means taking a moment to pause and ensure that your leadership approach is having the intended impact. In today's fast-paced world, it can be tempting to go on autopilot to keep things moving quickly. But mismatching your leadership approach to the situation at hand can have significant negative consequences, including poor performance, lower engagement and higher turnover. You're not going to get it right the first time every time, but leading with intention means checking in with yourself and your team, recognizing the mismatch and adjusting accordingly.

There is a lot of responsibility associated with being a leader, whether your influence is formal or informal. The most effective leaders are constantly striving for improvement. By building adaptability on a foundation of awareness, you set yourself up to address any situation and show your organization and team members that you care about them and want them to succeed. This is the kind of trust and accountability that not only carries organizations through difficult changes but transforms them for the better.

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