

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 8, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U. S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We write to express our opposition to inclusion of the North Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, and Eastern Gulf of Mexico planning areas in the recently-released draft proposed program for offshore oil and gas leasing for 2019-2024 (National OCS Program). We urge you to heed the voice of local government leaders and military experts who have expressed strong opposition to offshore drilling and exploration in these regions. Oil and gas development off our shores would threaten our coastal economies, conflict with critical military training activities, and violate core conservative principles. Please remove the North Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, and Eastern Gulf of Mexico planning regions from the draft 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program (National OCS Program).

Oil and gas development off the East Coast poses a real threat to the fishing, tourism, and recreation-based businesses based there that each year generate around \$95 billion in gross domestic product and support nearly 1.4 million jobs. The *BP Deepwater Horizon* oil spill caused 10 million lost days of beach, fishing, and boating activity. Many leisure travelers stayed away from Florida's Gulf Coast in the months following the spill, even in areas that did not have oil on their beaches. Furthermore, scientific research shows offshore activities could cause serious damage to our fisheries, including significantly decreased catch rates of profitable commercial species of fish and shellfish.

This new National OCS Program proposes to offer leases in areas that have extensive military operations, thus risking our national security training and readiness. The draft plan deviates from the longstanding tradition of deference to the Department of Defense (DoD) when offering offshore drilling leases in federal waters. The Atlantic and Eastern Gulf of Mexico are home to critical coastal military facilities, including Norfolk Naval Station - the largest naval station in the world. In the Atlantic Ocean, DoD conducts extensive readiness operations including live fire tests, air-to-surface bombing exercises, homing torpedo testing, supersonic test flights, laser targeting operations, and both Naval Air and Sea Systems Commands. DoD's 2015 report on mission compatibility with offshore leasing indicated that significant restrictions on oil and gas activity in the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic planning regions would be necessary to ensure that DoD activities would not be impaired.

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Furthermore, DoD has made it clear that the continuation of the moratorium on oil and gas leasing in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico is essential to vital military readiness activities. An April 2017 letter from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense states, “The Department of Defense (DoD) cannot overstate the vital importance of maintaining this moratorium.” The letter continues, “The moratorium on oil and gas ‘leasing, pre-leasing, and other related activities’ ensures that these vital military readiness activities may be conducted without interference and is critical to their continuation. Emerging technologies...will require enlarged testing and training footprints, and increased DoD reliance of the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act’s moratorium beyond 2022.” A separate June 2017 letter from the Air Force states, “The moratorium is essential for developing and sustaining the Air Force’s future combat capabilities.”

By bringing offshore drilling to shores where Americans have already spoken vehemently against it, this plan undermines Congress’ commitment to local and state decision-making. The Governors of Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida are formally opposed to offshore drilling in the Atlantic, and more than 140 municipalities along the East Coast have passed resolutions opposing offshore oil and gas drilling and exploration. In addition, the New England, Mid- and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the Department of Defense, Air Force, Florida Defense Support Task Force, and NASA have all weighed in to express serious concerns or opposition to these activities. More than 41,000 businesses and 500,000 fishing families have also joined this overwhelming chorus of voices.

We support the Administration’s vision to make the United States energy independent, but offshore drilling in these regions is not the answer. Unfortunately, the draft National OCS Program would threaten our coastal economies and military readiness and violates core conservative principles. For these reasons, we must urge you to remove the North Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, and Eastern Gulf of Mexico planning areas from consideration in the 2019-2024 National OCS Program.

Sincerely,



Mark Sanford
Member of Congress



John Rutherford
Member of Congress



Francis Rooney
Member of Congress



Frank LoBiondo
Member of Congress



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