

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 11, 2017

Secretary Ryan Zinke  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C St NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We are writing to express our strong opposition to oil and gas leasing in the Atlantic Ocean and Eastern Gulf of Mexico. We are responding to the July 3<sup>rd</sup> Request for Information on the preparation of a new five-year National Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2019-2022.

The vitality of our coastal economies is inextricably tied to healthy ocean ecosystems. We are unwilling to accept the tremendous risks, which vastly outweigh the potential gains of oil and gas drilling and development in the Atlantic and Eastern Gulf of Mexico. Currently, healthy ocean ecosystems along the East Coast support more than \$95 billion in gross domestic product and nearly 1.4 million jobs annually through fishing, recreation and tourism.

We hear from countless business owners, elected officials and residents along our coasts who recognize and reject the risks of offshore oil and gas development. More than 120 local governments have passed formal resolutions opposing oil and gas exploration and/or drilling in the Atlantic or Eastern Gulf, as do numerous local chambers of commerce, tourism and restaurant associations, commercial and recreational fishing associations, and the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils. More than 41,000 businesses and 500,000 commercial fishing families have joined together to strongly oppose offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling. Further, the Department of Defense, the Air Force, NASA, and the Florida Defense Support Task Force have also expressed concerns that offshore oil and gas development would threaten their ability to perform critical activities.

Expanding offshore drilling into the Atlantic and the Eastern Gulf of Mexico would significantly risk our military readiness and national security. Operations such as Strike Group transit and training, tactical training, drone launch/recovery hazard areas, Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR), Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) live fire, anti-submarine warfare exercises, live air-to-surface ordinance operations, and more have resulted in the Department of Defense restricting 123,803 square nautical miles of Atlantic OCS from oil and gas activity.<sup>1</sup> The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) asserts that the presence of temporary or fixed structures at or below the sea surface would have significant detrimental effects on their ability to conduct aerospace test activities. In fact, even the temporary presence of support ships

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.boem.gov/2017-2022-DoD-OCS-Report/>

or aircraft can result in mandatory range safety criteria not being met, leading to missed launch opportunities such as resupply missions to the International Space Station.<sup>2</sup>

The Department of Defense's activities are also pervasive in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico. According to the USAF Chief of Staff, "the moratorium is essential for developing and sustaining the Air Force's future combat capabilities."<sup>3</sup> The Florida Defense Support Task Force states that "drilling east of the Military Mission Line (MML) would mean loss of ranges and possible relocation of aircraft/bases to other unrestricted range areas."<sup>4</sup> Defense is Florida's fourth largest industry, and in northwest Florida, 65% of the regional economy is "considerably dependent on unconstrained access to the eastern Gulf of Mexico airspace and sea space."<sup>5</sup>

Opening the Atlantic to offshore oil and gas drilling and development jeopardizes our coastal businesses, fishing communities, tourism industry, and our national security. Exploration activities harm our coastal economies in the near term and open the door to even greater risks from offshore oil and gas production down the road. Therefore, we urge you not to include the Atlantic Ocean or the Eastern Gulf of Mexico in the National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2019-2024.

Sincerely,



FRANK PALLONE, JR.  
Member of Congress



MARK SANFORD  
Member of Congress



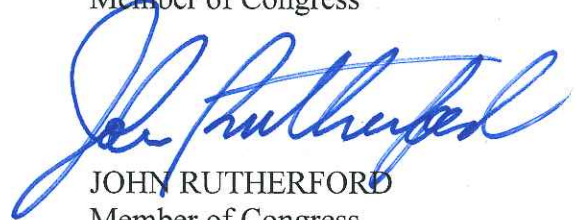
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<sup>2</sup><https://bloximages.newyork1.vip.townnews.com/pilotoonline.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/4/e0/4e0dd62d-0729-56d3-a75b-18887cc58dc4/56cf3586d6cef.pdf.pdf>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.billnelson.senate.gov/sites/default/files/06.27.17%20CSAF%20Letter%20to%20Sen%20Nelson%20Re%20Moratorium%20on%20Leasing%20Land.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.enterpriseflorida.com/wp-content/uploads/FDSTF-White-Paper-Oil-Drilling-and-Military-Mission-Compatibility.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

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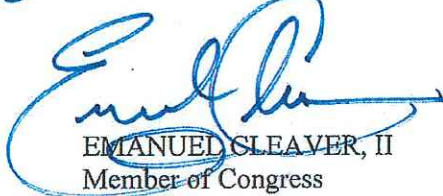
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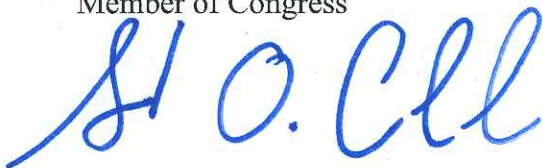
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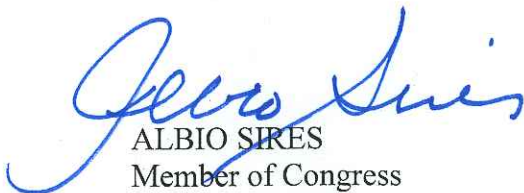
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