

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 20, 2015

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

We write to express serious concerns with the Department of Interior's recently released draft Five-Year program for oil and gas development. While we recognize the tremendous strides you and the Administration have made toward American energy independence and appreciate there must be a balanced approach between conservation and oil and gas development to meet our energy needs, we are deeply troubled that the Department has reversed its moratorium on offshore drilling off the Atlantic Coast, specifically in waters off of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Drilling on the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf (AOCS) is a source of considerable debate in the Commonwealth. It threatens local economies, ecosystems, natural resources, and poses significant national security concerns.

For example, the Navy and NASA have repeatedly said that OCS drilling could significantly affect their abilities to carry out training and testing activities in support of America's national security and strategic interests. A May 2010 Department of Defense report found that nearly 80 percent of the drilling area proposed to be leased off the coast of Virginia would interfere with U.S. Navy training and operations.

We worry the Interior Department's decision could threaten the Defense Department's presence in this region and have a significant negative effect on the regional economy. According to a 2013 Hampton Roads Planning District Report, "Defense-related activities and spending account for 41.2% of the region's economy, generating approximately \$35.2 billion in gross regional product." They go on to point out that the Department of Defense spending on salaries, retirement, and procurement account for approximately 393,000 jobs, or 40% of the employment in the region. Military personnel stationed in the Hampton Roads region account for more than 92,000 jobs, and \$8.3 billion in salary and benefits. In addition, more than 51,000 federal

civilians support DoD's mission, and in FY 2012 regional contracts totaled more than \$7.9 billion.

A recent study also found that drilling on the AOCS would have a negative effect on fishing, tourism, and recreation which support over 91,000 jobs and generate nearly \$5 billion in GDP in Virginia. In 2014, there were more than 2.1 million visitors to Assateague Island National Seashore.

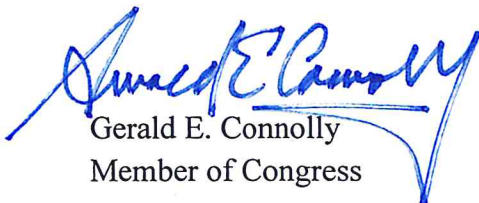
While the Department has proposed a 50-mile coastal buffer to minimize such multiple-use conflicts -- which also include renewable energy activities, commercial and recreational fishing, and critical habitat needs for wildlife, and other environmental concerns -- this falls short of giving our communities the protection they deserve.

What's particularly troubling to us is that the risks far outweigh the rewards considering this short-sighted action would yield nothing more than a few days-worth of national oil and gas supply. In addition, the Department itself has made note of the "lack of infrastructure to support oil and gas exploration and development as well as spill preparedness and response" along the Atlantic Coast in deferring such activities in the past. While we commend the Administration for protecting 12 million acres of Alaska's Arctic National Refuge from drilling, it is disappointing and ironic for the Administration to simultaneously expose Virginia's coastline to many of the very same threats.

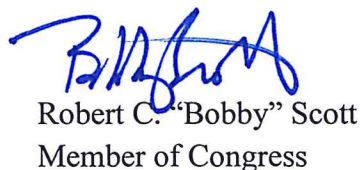
As the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster painfully demonstrated, we must exercise extreme caution in expanding OCS drilling. The Department's previous assessments and moratorium on such activities off the Atlantic Coast reflected that prudence.

We instead suggest the Department build on opportunities to expand renewable energy production, such as wind energy. Studies have shown that offshore wind has the potential to create nearly as much energy as oil and gas drilling and 1.5 times as many jobs in Virginia. Let's deliver on the promise of the "Smart from the Start" program, which is expediting commercial-scale wind energy on the federal OCS, and the recent lease auction off Virginia's coastline. These efforts will be critical to growing a clean and renewable energy future. We respectfully urge you to reconsider this decision to include portions of the Atlantic OCS in the gas lease program for 2017-2022.

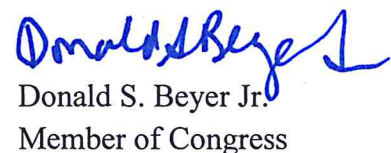
Sincerely,



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress