

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chair
Environment and Related Agencies
B-308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member
Environment and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman McCollum and Ranking Member Joyce:

As you prepare the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill for the fiscal year 2021 (FY21), we ask that you include language prohibiting federal funds from being used to allow for any new oil and gas leasing, pre-leasing, or seismic activities in Outer Continental Shelf planning areas along the Pacific coast, Atlantic coast, Florida's coast, and the Arctic Ocean.

Measures like these have enjoyed bipartisan support in the past. Americans have already seen firsthand the disastrous impacts oil spills inflict on our economy, fishing communities and sensitive ecosystems. Our ocean and coastal economies help sustain lucrative tourism, fishing and recreation industries in the Atlantic, Pacific, and eastern Gulf of Mexico. There, they support more than 2.6 million jobs and generate roughly \$180 billion in gross domestic product (GDP) year after year. In Alaska, these industries, which are reliant on healthy oceans, provided 33,055 jobs and contributed \$2.2 billion to the state's GDP in 2016. Expanding offshore drilling would jeopardize the livelihoods and economic security of coastal residents across the country. More than 370 municipalities, industry alliances representing more than 50,000 business and 500,000 fishing families are acutely aware of these risks and are all opposed to drilling.

Past disasters clearly demonstrate the economic risks that new offshore drilling would bring Americans. The 1969 oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, spewed more than four million gallons of crude oil into the Pacific Ocean. The largest oil spill in U.S. history at the time, this disaster had lasting effects on Santa Barbara's unique marine life and economy. In 1988, a spill off Washington released more than 230,000 gallons of oil and affected over 110 miles of our coastline. More recently in 2015, the Plains All American Pipeline spill off Santa Barbara County released over 100,000 gallons of crude oil into the environment – shutting down fishing grounds, closing popular beaches and costing more than \$92 million to clean-up.

Similarly, the Gulf coast experienced the catastrophic impacts of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster, the largest marine oil spill in history to date. The well gushed for 87 days and at its

worst, leaked more than 2.5 million gallons of oil a day. This catastrophe devastated the entire region's ecosystem and left a significant human toll. It caused the deaths of 11 rig workers, and an estimated 10 million user-days of beach, fishing and boating activity were lost in the Gulf region due to closures following the spill. It decimated local economies that rely on fishing, tourism and marine recreation.

In the seven years following *Deepwater Horizon*, the oil and gas industry experienced more than 4,000 explosions, collisions, and related incidents, including 34 oil spills of more than 2,000 gallons each. We believe this track record makes the expansion of drilling into the Atlantic unwise. Spills there would threaten over 1.5 million jobs and over \$108 billion in GDP along the East Coast for what is estimated to be only seven months' worth of oil and six months' worth of gas.

Until *Deepwater Horizon*, the worst oil spill in U.S. waters occurred in Prince William Sound off the coast of Alaska on March 24, 1989, when the *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker ran into a reef. Nearly 11 million gallons of crude oil polluted 1,300 miles of coastline and adjacent waters, killing hundreds of thousands of animals, and some whale and seabird populations have yet to recover. Many fishermen went bankrupt when populations of Pacific herring collapsed. The federal government found a 75 percent chance of one or more major oil spills if development were to occur, and experts agree there is no effective way to contain or clean up a spill. With Alaska warming at three times the rate as the rest of the U.S., recent research concluded that all Arctic oil and gas reserves must remain in the ground to avoid dangerous levels of global warming.

The Atlantic coast is already under imminent threat from the pre-drilling activity of seismic exploration. In November 2018, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) issued Incidental Harassment Authorizations (IHAs) for five companies to harm marine mammals while conducting large-scale seismic survey's for oil and gas in the Atlantic. The next step is the issuance by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management of Geological and Geophysical Permits, which would allow these companies to commence seismic airgun blasting, the means by which testing takes place.

Seismic airguns produce loud, repetitive noise that travels underwater up to 2,500 miles, and are repeated as often as every ten seconds for days, weeks, or months at a time. Airgun noise can disturb, injure, or kill marine animals from zooplankton at the base of the food web, to large whales. The aforementioned IHAs allow nearly 850 combined days of around-the-clock activity, amounting to more than five million total seismic airgun blasts in an area from Cape May, New Jersey to Cape Canaveral, Florida. This blast zone contains at least 34 species of marine mammals (including the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale and endangered sea turtles), as well as hundreds of species of fish and shellfish, many of which support important commercial and recreational fisheries.

We must take the appropriate steps to protect our nation's coastlines. This is a bipartisan issue, with every East and West Coast governor, Republican and Democrat alike, in opposition to the administration's proposal to drill off their coasts. Congress should respect this bipartisan outcry and must not allow taxpayer funds to be used to put our coastlines at risk.

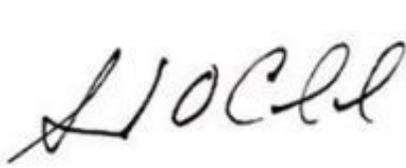
Accordingly, we ask that you work to include the following language in the FY2021 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill:

None of the funds made available in this Act may be used by the Secretary of the Interior or the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to conduct or authorize oil and gas preleasing, leasing, or related activities, including but not limited to the issuance of permits for geological and geophysical exploration, in any planning area where the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Proposed Final Program (November 2016) did not schedule leases.

Inclusion of this language would ensure that federal funds are not used for any oil and gas leasing or pre-leasing activities in FY21, including seismic testing, in planning areas along our coastlines and the Arctic.

Thank you for your consideration of our request to protect our coastal and economic resources.

Sincerely,



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone Jr.
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Joe Cunningham
Member of Congress

Member of Congress

FY21 Letter Sign-on Protecting Our Coasts from Offshore Oil Drilling

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