

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 6, 2006

The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary
U.S. Department of Interior
Minerals Management Service
3120 Elden Street
Herndon, Virginia 20170

Dear Secretary Norton:

We are writing to express our strong opposition to the Minerals Management Service's (MMS) "Draft Proposed Program Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program." This draft proposal, which was released to the public on February 8, 2005, has severe implications on Florida's economy and environment. We request that the MMS continue to refine this plan taking into account our following concerns.

As you know, the plan proposes drastically altering the Eastern Gulf of Mexico Planning Area boundary. The proposal moves a large portion of Lease Sale 181 from the Eastern Planning Area into the Central Planning Area. Lease Sale 181, which has been at the center of the discussion regarding offshore drilling, comes within 16 miles of Pensacola's beaches. Despite the close proximity of the area, the MMS's plan severely limits Florida's ability to have input on activities in the region.

Under the proposed arrangement, an additional two million acres of Lease Sale 181 would be opened for oil exploration and drilling. Specifically, the plan calls for the sale of areas within Lease Sale 181 five separate times, making this area the most intensively leased region on the entire OCS.

The MMS has indicated that the planning area boundary was changed "to correspond with new Federal Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) offshore administrative areas announced in January." However, it appears that another reason for the change is to allow the MMS to bypass the concerns many Members of the Florida Delegation have continuously expressed about drilling in what was once considered the Eastern Gulf of Mexico. We ask MMS to restore the Eastern and Central Gulf of Mexico Planning Area Boundaries to their original location and remove the additional two million acres of Lease Sale Area 181 from consideration.

As we have stated numerous times in the past, the State of Florida's economic future is heavily dependent on a clean and healthy environment. Our economy is built upon the thousands of jobs that are created by visitors who vacation on our beautiful beaches. Environmental

Secretary Gale Norton

February 9, 2006

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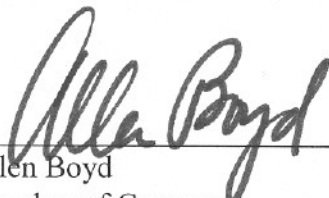
damage resulting from an oil spill or any other mishap associated with offshore drilling could be devastating to our economy. Unfortunately, MMS's proposed five year plan increases the risk of such an occurrence.

Again, we ask that you carefully consider our concerns as you continue working on the 2007-2012 OCS leasing plan. We look forward to discussing this matter with you further.

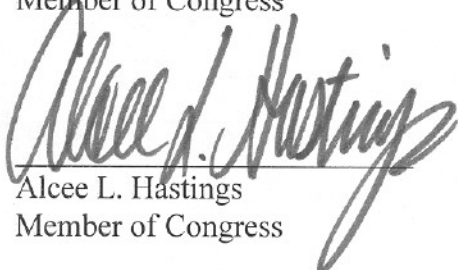
Sincerely,



Jim Davis
Member of Congress



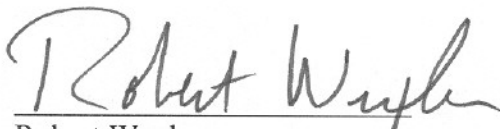
Allen Boyd
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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Robert Wexler
Member of Congress



Kendrick B. Meek
Member of Congress



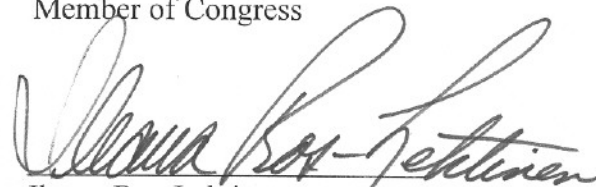
Mark Foley, M.C.
Member of Congress



Clay Shaw
Member of Congress



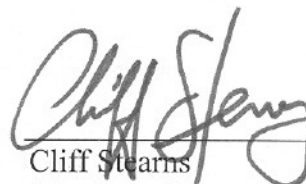
C.W. Bill Young
Member of Congress



Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress

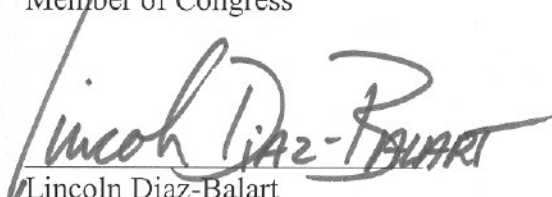


Ginny Brown-Waite
Member of Congress




Cliff Stearns
Member of Congress

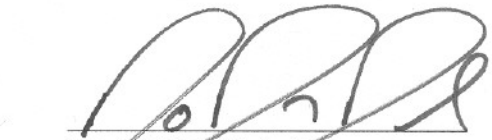

Corrine Brown
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cc: Renee Orr, 5-Year Program Manager


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