

JIM DAVIS

11TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA
www.house.gov/jimdavis/

WASHINGTON OFFICE:

409 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3376

DISTRICT OFFICES:

3315 HENDERSON BOULEVARD, #100
TAMPA, FL 33609
(813) 354-9217
(888) 266-0205 FLORIDA TOLL FREE

1186 62ND AVENUE SOUTH
ST. PETERSBURG, FL 33705
(727) 867-5301

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0911

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
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AIR QUALITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, TRADE, AND
CONSUMER PROTECTION

April 6, 2006

The Honorable R.M. "Johnnie" Burton
Director
Minerals Management Service
381 Elden Street
Herndon, Virginia 20170

Dear Ms. Burton:

As you know, on April 3, 2006, I hosted a public meeting in Tampa, Florida. The meeting allowed area residents to easily participate in the discussion about the Minerals Management Service's "Draft Proposed Program Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program." Nearly 100 Floridians came to the public meeting to voice their concerns about the proposal. The crowd included small business owners, local business leaders, environmentalists and local government officials.

Enclosed you will find materials from the meeting, including a video of the event and a presentation delivered by Dr. Robert Weisberg, a professor of physical oceanography at the University of South Florida College of Marine Science. I ask that you give these materials careful consideration as the Minerals Management Service continues to refine the proposal.

As you will see in Dr. Weisberg's presentation, offshore drilling in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico poses a real threat to both of Florida's coasts. In the event of an offshore drilling accident, powerful loop currents in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico would rapidly carry materials through the Florida Straits and up the east coast, tarring the Florida Keys and Florida's Atlantic beaches. Likewise, ocean circulation on the West Florida Shelf, driven by wind and surface heating, would result in oil and tar washing up on Florida's Gulf Coast beaches.

The damage resulting from an offshore drilling accident would not be limited to our beaches. The State of Florida's economic future is heavily dependent on a clean and healthy environment. As the Chairman of the St. Petersburg City Council, Bill Foster, noted at the public meeting, there are many reasons to vacation in Florida, but none are as important as our white sand beaches. It is clear that our economy is built upon the thousands of jobs that are created by visitors who vacation on these beaches. In fact, last year more than 85 million people visited the state. According to Thom Stork, President of the Florida Aquarium and Chairman of Visit Florida, the State's official tourism marketing agency, those visitors contributed over \$57 billion to the State's economy. Vacationers not only contribute to the financial success of businesses connected to Florida's tourism industry, but their spending provides the state with needed revenue to construct roads and build schools.

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Florida residents understand that high energy prices create a challenging environment for our nation's manufacturers, farmers and consumers. However, the insufficient amount of oil and natural gas in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico would not provide the American public with relief. That is why many of the participants at the meeting encouraged the federal government to push for increased fuel efficiency standards and continued research into alternative sources of energy. To that end, I will continue working with my colleagues in Congress to ensure that we can find solutions to satisfactorily accomplish these goals.

In conclusion, the economic risks associated with offshore drilling are greater than the economic rewards. Our nation would receive an amount of oil and natural gas so minimal that it would not break the United States' dependence on foreign oil or provide relief to consumers. In return, the State of Florida stands to lose billions of dollars, thousands of jobs, and one of our nation's greatest treasures – Florida's Beaches.

In the future, I hope that the Minerals Management Service recognizes the impact that offshore drilling has on Florida's beaches, economy and residents. Public hearings throughout the State benefit both the public and policy makers.

Again, I ask that you carefully consider the enclosed information and the concerns expressed at my public meeting. If you have any questions, please contact me or Patrick Givens of my staff at (202) 225-3376.

Sincerely,



Jim Davis
Member of Congress

Cc: Ms. Renee Orr