

Dissenting Views
H.R. 1230: Restarting American Offshore Leasing Now Act

We oppose H.R. 1230 because it is a blatant political attempt to use rising gasoline prices as an excuse to grant enormous, multi-national energy companies more access to the Gulf with less oversight. Enacting this legislation would have no impact on the price of gasoline but *would* make another catastrophic oil spill more likely.

The short title of H.R. 1230 asserts that the purpose of the legislation is to “restart” offshore leasing. Of course, the legislation is belated given that the Obama Administration restarted offshore drilling in February and has already announced plans to offer all three Gulf of Mexico lease sales mandated in the bill later this year or early next year. As a result, H.R. 1230 “restarts” nothing, but would mandate that the lease sales go forward within unreasonable time limits and without proper environmental review.

In addition to destroying beaches, livelihoods and lives, the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster destroyed any notion that pre-spill environmental reviews were adequate. As is too often the case, these environmental review documents turned out to be amalgamations of wildly speculative industry claims, outdated or inaccurate information and cookie-cutter, boilerplate verbiage. Virtually every assumption these reviews were based upon washed away in the BP spill.

The existing environmental impact statements for the Gulf lease sales were completed in 2007, long before the BP spill. Amongst other deficiencies, these reviews assume “the most likely size of an offshore spill greater than or equal to 1,000 barrels that is predicted to occur is 4,600 barrels” of oil. The 2007 analysis concluded that the total volume of oil that would be spilled from all spills in the central and western Gulf over the next 40 years would be roughly 47,000 barrels. That is less than what was spilled during the Deepwater Horizon disaster in one day. Finally, these reviews concluded that in a worst case scenario, only 19 to 31 miles of Gulf coastline would be impacted by a spill. In reality, the Deepwater Horizon disaster resulted in oil reaching over 950 miles of the Gulf coastline, according to NOAA. Nevertheless, H.R. 1230 would “deem” these outdated and demonstrably inadequate reviews as satisfying the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act for these new lease sales.

Rigorous engagement in the review process required under NEPA would provide the ideal forum to review these assumptions in light of the BP spill, gather expert as well as public input, and formulate policy to allow drilling to proceed without repeating the mistakes which led to the BP calamity. H.R. 1230 prohibits that process.

H.R. 1230 would also force the Interior Department to conduct a lease sale off the coast of Virginia within one year. Opening up the coastline of the East Coast to drilling within one year, before any new safety standards for offshore drilling have been enacted by the Congress, is reckless and would endanger the economies and the environment of the Mid-Atlantic coastal states.

Energy and Mineral Subcommittee Ranking Member Holt offered amendments to cure the NEPA deficiencies in the bill, which were rejected in lock-step by the Majority. Further, Ranking Member Markey offered an amendment to insure that, if these lease sales are to go forward, they must provide a fair return to the American taxpayers; that too was rejected. Representative Sarbanes offered an amendment to remove the ill-considered lease sale off Virginia, which was also defeated. Finally, Representative Lujan offered an amendment seeking to guarantee that the energy resources produced pursuant to these leases would at least remain in the United States. That basic assurance was also rejected by the Majority.

Witness after witness before the Natural Resources Committee has made clear that the price of oil is determined on an international market, largely controlled by OPEC. Increases in U.S. domestic production can easily be offset by reductions in OPEC production in order to maintain high prices.

H.R. 1230 will not change this reality. All it would do is insist on denying the reality of the BP spill and put the Gulf and the Nation back on the dangerous path that led to that tragic event.

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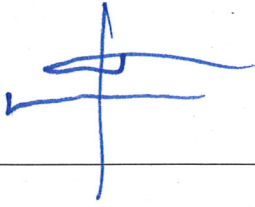
Betty Sutton

Raul M. Grijalva

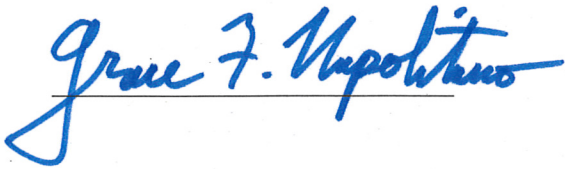
Ben Ray Lujan

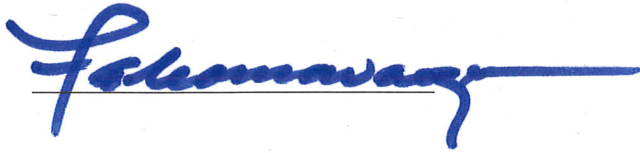
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Frank Pallone Jr.

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