

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

May 28, 2020

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

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

Dear Chairwoman McCollum and Ranking Member Joyce:

As you continue your work on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill for fiscal year 2021 (FY21), we ask that you include bill 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. In addition, we request that you include report language clarifying the definition of pre-leasing activities.

Implementing a federal moratorium on offshore oil leasing activities in new areas has enjoyed support from both sides of the aisle—including Republican and Democratic administrations alike. That is because many of our constituents have experienced firsthand the devastating impacts that oil spills inflict on our economy, fishing communities, and sensitive ecosystems. Our ocean and coastal economies help sustain thriving tourism, fishing, and recreation industries in the Atlantic, Pacific, and eastern Gulf of Mexico. These industries support more than 2.6 million jobs and generate roughly \$180 billion in gross domestic product (GDP) year after year. In Alaska, where the economy is reliant on healthy oceans, these industries 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 countless Americans across the country who depend on our coastal economies. Over 370 municipalities and alliances representing more than 50,000 businesses and 500,000 fishing families strongly agree and oppose new drilling.

Past disasters clearly demonstrate the economic risks that new offshore drilling would bring Americans. On the West Coast, the 1969 oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, spewed more than four million gallons of crude oil into the Pacific Ocean. This was the largest oil spill in U.S. history at the time. Its impacts were so devastating, it led to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) within the federal government. More recently, the Plains All American Pipeline spill off Santa Barbara County in 2015 released over 100,000 gallons of crude oil produced offshore into the environment. It shut down fishing grounds, closed popular beaches, and cost 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 2.1 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 over 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, including some whale and seabird populations that have yet to recover. Many fishermen went bankrupt when populations of Pacific herring collapsed, and the spill caused over \$300 million of economic harm to fisheries. The risks posed by drilling in the Arctic Ocean are significant for Alaska and for the country: the federal government estimates a 75 percent chance of one or more major oil spills if development moves forward, and experts agree there is no effective way to contain or clean up a spill.

Lastly, 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 testing using seismic airgun blasting.

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 fish and 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 turtle – 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 issue transcends party lines, with every East and West Coast governor, Republican and Democrat alike, standing in opposition to the administration's proposal to drill off their coasts. Congress should respect this bipartisan outcry and 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:

Sec. ____. (a) *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.*

(b) *The restrictions under subsection (a) apply to the formal steps identified by the Department of the Interior and the enabling steps prior to leasing, including the issuance of permits for geological and geophysical exploration.*

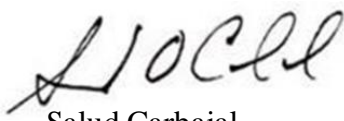
We also ask that you include report language clarifying that it is the intent of Congress to prohibit taxpayer dollars from being used for offshore oil pre-leasing activities:

Under Department-wide provisions, bill language is included to prohibit the use of funds for Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) leasing and related activities in several areas. The restrictions apply to the formal steps identified by the Department of the Interior and the enabling steps prior to leasing or to the consideration of areas for leasing as part of a leasing program, including the issuance of permits for geological and geophysical exploration. The Committee disaffirms the definition of OCS preleasing activities stated in H. Rept. 102-116 (pp. 46-47).

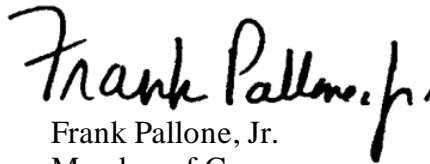
Inclusion of this language would ensure that federal funds are not used for any oil and gas leasing or pre-leasing activities in FY21, including seismic testing, in planning areas along our coastlines and the Arctic.

Thank you for your consideration of our request to protect our coastal and economic resources. We stand ready to provide any assistance. Please do not hesitate to contact our offices should you have any questions.

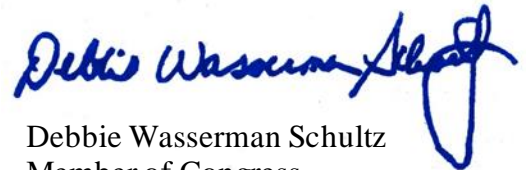
Sincerely,



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