

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 27, 2015

The Honorable Sally Jewell  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

As Members of Congress who represent Atlantic states, we are encouraged by the Department of the Interior's (DOI) decision to include areas in the Mid and South Atlantic as part of the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program ("Five Year Program"), but we remain disappointed in the draft plan's unnecessary restrictions in the Atlantic that could jeopardize America's long-term energy and economic security. As the planning process moves forward in the development of the Five Year Program, we urge you to retain the entire proposed Atlantic lease sale 260 area without further restricting these areas for future oil and gas leasing, exploration, and production.

A strong all-of-the-above energy strategy for our nation cannot exist without a robust offshore oil and gas leasing program that includes access to America's energy resources in the Atlantic. In the current 2012-2017 Five Year Program, 87 percent of America's OCS remains off-limits to energy leasing, exploration and production. While other countries are actively expanding OCS energy development, it is unacceptable that our nation remains blindfolded with regard to what resources exist offshore and that this Administration continues to unnecessarily restrict access to critical domestic energy resources. The American public, and particularly the overwhelming majority of residents in our states, support the increased development of our nation's OCS resources, and we wish to see a Five Year Program that reflects these important principles. Restricting access within a 50 mile buffer along the entirety of the proposed area, and only including one lease sale in 2021, fails to meet this standard. We urge the Department to reconsider the configuration of the buffer and add more lease sales earlier in the plan, which would more accurately reflect the desires of individual states.

As we have seen in the Gulf of Mexico and in other areas around the world for decades, other ocean industries, as well as tourism and military operations, can all thrive in conjunction with offshore energy exploration and development. In addition, there are numerous existing regulatory systems – at the state, federal, and local levels – that ensure the compatibility of all industries, as well as the conservation of our environment. By relying upon a cooperative process to reach science-based decisions, offshore development is guided by ample public input from state officials, local communities and leaders, and all coastal stakeholders. Furthermore, the energy industry has enhanced spill prevention and containment, as well as proven response capabilities, and the Department's robust regulatory requirements have put in place various new standards that have made offshore drilling safer than ever. As the co-chairs of the national spill commission formed after Macondo said in April 2014, "offshore drilling is safer than it was four years ago."

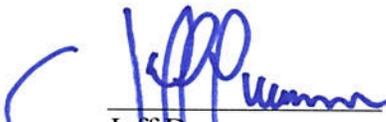
There is strong bipartisan support in our states from members of Congress, governors, state legislators, local leaders and the general public for allowing oil and natural gas development in the Atlantic. Our states, which have not seen the direct benefits of offshore development, are anxious to reap the many economic benefits and help put America on a path to greater energy security.

Offshore energy production must play a key role as America continues to grow as an energy superpower – creating more good-paying American jobs, providing much-needed federal and local government revenue, and enhancing our nation's energy security. For these many reasons, we urge the Department to move forward with a Five Year Program that includes the entire proposed Atlantic lease sale 260 area without any additional restrictions on access, while thoughtfully reconsidering the proposed 50 mile buffer.

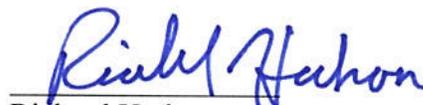
It is also important that the Department work quickly to approve permits for seismic and other geophysical surveys in the Atlantic. These permits have been pending since last July when the Department completed its Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision for Geological and Geophysical Activities in the Mid- and South Atlantic OCS. Since the current estimates of the Atlantic's resource potential are out of date and based on surveys conducted over 30 years ago, the information derived from these new surveys will provide an updated and environmentally safe assessment of the oil and natural gas reserves in the Atlantic. As you have indicated in testimony before Congress, the importance of these surveys will enable informed decisions to be made on how to best utilize these resources to ensure our future energy security. Timely consideration and approval of the permits is critical so that companies can plan their operations, conduct the surveys, and process the data into meaningful tools that can be used by decision-makers.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that exploration and production of our natural resources continues to move America to energy security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We await your response.

Sincerely,



Jeff Duncan  
Member of Congress



Richard Hudson  
Member of Congress



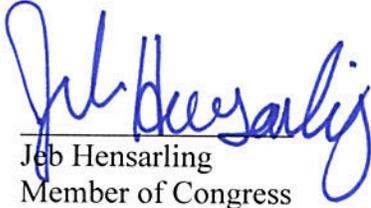
Scott Rigell  
Member of Congress



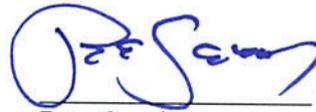
Bob Goodlatte  
Member of Congress



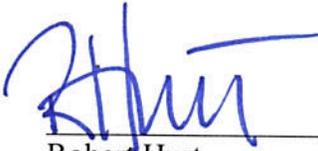
Tom Price  
Member of Congress



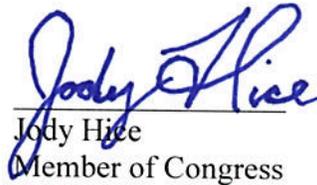
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Pete Sessions  
Member of Congress



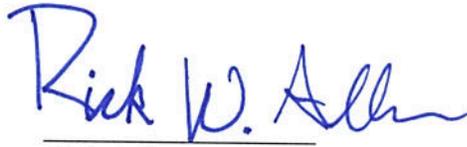
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Mick Mulvaney  
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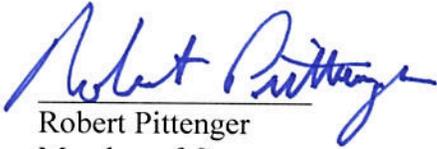
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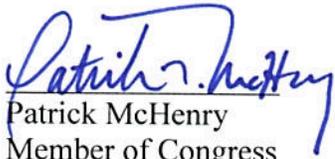
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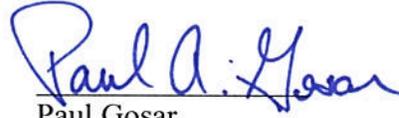
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