

## **A Letter Proposing a Mid-Atlantic Coastal Protection Act to Protect Mid-Atlantic Coastal Waters and the Outer Continental Shelf from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) Offshore Drilling Proposals**

Date: March 5th, 2017

From: Isaac Bardin, New York, NY & Ted Randell, Buffalo, NY

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand

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Dear Senator Gillibrand,

We write to urge you, as a member of the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife, to introduce legislation similar to the New England Coastal Protection Act (H.R. 4774). This recently proposed bill by Senator Whitehouse (D-RI) would prohibit oil and gas leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf of New England. We believe that mid-Atlantic states need similar legislation to protect our coastlines, wildlife, and communities from the Trump administration's ill-advised attempt to drill for fossil fuels off multiple coasts of the US.

We believe that you should introduce and co-sponsor a "Mid-Atlantic Coastal Protection Act", to prevent the BOEM Draft Offshore Oil & Gas Leasing Program for 2019-2024. This Act would protect the coastlines of New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. As both Democrat and Republican governors have expressed their desire to prevent East Coast offshore drilling, this act would have a ripple effect, possibly leading to new protections for critical Southern, Western, and Alaskan coastline. If we don't take action, newly developed oil and gas extraction will present irreversible threats to our nation's coastlines, endangered species and the ecosystems they rely on, coastal tourism jobs, and the progress that many mid-Atlantic states have made in developing renewable energy policy. The multiple offshore leases are part of a dated paradigm, and are a digression from New York State's trajectory of supporting clean energy through policies such as the New York State Offshore Wind Master Plan and the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). Energy independence through the adoption of renewables is a safer and more responsible use of the Outer Continental Shelf than drilling for oil.

From its birth, the Trump administration's drilling proposal was cloaked in secrecy. This policy to amend the Obama administration's five-year drilling plan wasn't announced in a public setting (such as a press conference, as is typical), but rather, U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke

presented the proposal at a closed-door meeting of the National Ocean Industries Association (NOIA) [1]. Originally launched by Exxon, NOIA was built to lobby for the expansion of oil and gas offshore drilling permits. NOIA's president, Randall Luthi, is a former Minerals Management Service official who now lobbies for industry interests, which, according to the watchdog Project on Government Oversight, should make us "question whose interests were actually being served when he was at [the] MMS".

The BOEM drilling proposal ignores the opposition of millions of Americans in the mid-Atlantic region. During BOEM's public comment period, more than 1.35 million comments from concerned citizens were submitted in opposition to Secretary Zinke's offshore drilling proposal [2]. Although Zinke said he would consider objections from state leaders and the public before finalizing the proposal, he has ignored the avalanche of public comments and requests for meetings in coastal communities, preferring instead to hobnob with oil and gas executives and industry representatives, taking over 180 direct meetings with them in the past four months [3].

It's not just the public who are enraged—politicians are too. Nearly every Eastern governor with ocean coastline opposes offshore drilling—in fact, the lone supporter of Trump's plan, out of all 20 states with proposed drilling, is Maine Governor Paul LePage [4]. Republicans and Democrats alike agree that offshore drilling would be an egregious mistake, and more than 150 House members and nearly 40 Senators have spoken out against the plan. You've experienced this outrage firsthand in the U.S. Senate—your colleagues' concerns are completely justified, as this drilling proposal would be detrimental to coastal tourism and ecosystems.

Even with far less offshore area being drilled in 2010, we saw the disastrous BP oil spill occur in the Gulf Coast, devastating coastal communities, tourism, and the marine environment for years to come, the effects of which are still felt today. With more proposed offshore drilling sites, disasters like these would inevitably begin to occur on the East coast. Even without taking spills themselves into account, the actual oil exploration process causes abandonment of habitat, disruption of mating and feeding, and beach strandings and death for marine species such as endangered cetaceans [5]. The Maryland Waterman's Association, the Lobstermen Association, and countless others have all stated that drilling would jeopardize fishing up and down the coast, an industry valued at \$214 billion [6]. If an oil spill occurs, we would see a situation similar to what happened after the BP spill, where seafood and fishing sales dropped by nearly 50% and jobs fell by a third, as consumers were concerned about consuming fish from the contaminated waters of the Gulf [5].

Additionally, tourism is an important driver of local economies—in six mid-Atlantic coastal states, there were 560,000 ocean-dependent tourism and recreation jobs that could be threatened by drilling [5]. The nonprofit Oceana estimates that Trump's proposal threatens more than 2.5 million jobs in total and roughly \$180 billion in GDP in coastal states overall [7].

New York specifically would be hit hard by Trump’s offshore drilling proposal— our coastal tourism industry, our waterways, and our beautiful natural ecosystems would all be irreparably damaged if no action is taken. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has requested exemption from the Trump administration’s plan, writing that “The long-term health of New York’s economy is inextricably linked to protecting our ocean resources...New York’s ocean coast is unique and plays a vital role in our economy” [8]. Cuomo also wants to develop \$6 billion of offshore wind projects on the coast of Long Island by 2028, a proposal that would power 1.2 million homes yearly with renewable energy, and would bring 5,000 jobs to the state [9]. Cuomo’s plan was developed as a direct answer and rebuke to the BOEM proposal, and the winner of the two is clear— the wind energy plan would power over one million New York State homes for the foreseeable future, while Trump’s plan (even if all the accessible areas in the Atlantic, Pacific, and the Gulf Coast were drilled) would meet America’s oil demands for only *two years* [7].

As your constituents and as ocean and clean energy advocates, we believe you have the unique position as a sitting member of the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife, to propose and co-sponsor a bill identical to H.R. 4774 “The New England Coastal Protection Act,” except that this bill would aid the *mid-Atlantic* states’ critical coastlines. Introducing this act would demonstrate your commitment to New York’s clean and progressive energy policy, and would fight for the future of New York State in Washington D.C., just as Gov. Cuomo is similarly fighting for us in Albany. If we don’t act now, coastlines will be at risk, New York’s economy could worsen, tourism and fishing jobs would be lost, and marine life could be further threatened. But by leading the way on this issue for the mid-Atlantic, you will cause a ripple that grows into a wave, paving the way for even ambivalent Republicans to reach across the aisle and join with Democrats to stop the BOEM drilling plan. We hope you will stand alongside New York residents and fight to defeat this unprecedented, undemocratic, and ill-advised plan.

Sincerely,

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## Footnotes

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- [3]. Fears, D. (2018, February 28). For many Republicans, Trump's offshore drilling plan and beaches don't mix. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/for-some-south-carolinarepublicans-trumps-offshore-drilling-plan-and-beaches-dont-mix/2018/02/27/a953dc98-1359-11e8-9065e55346f6de81\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.74d2dfce88a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/for-some-south-carolinarepublicans-trumps-offshore-drilling-plan-and-beaches-dont-mix/2018/02/27/a953dc98-1359-11e8-9065e55346f6de81_story.html?utm_term=.74d2dfce88a)
- [4]. Merica, D. (2018, January 12). Nearly every governor with ocean coastline opposes Trump's drilling proposal. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/11/politics/governors-ocean-coastline-offshoredrilling-trump/index.html>
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- [8]. Donnelly, G. (2018, January 16). Gov. Cuomo Asks That New York Be Exempt From Trump's Offshore Drilling Plans. Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <http://fortune.com/2018/01/16/offshore-drilling-ny/>
- [9]. Berke, J. (2018, February 05). New York's \$6 billion plan for offshore wind shows that oil drilling really is on the way out. Retrieved March 04, 2018, from <http://www.businessinsider.com/new-york-state-6-billion-offshorewind-industry-plan-2018-2>

For more information, refer to the text of H.R. 4774 “The New England Coastal Protection Act” at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-115hr4774ih/pdf/BILLS-115hr4774ih.pdf>