

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

June 15, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

We write to urge you to protect the coasts of Florida from oil and gas development. As you know, in 2019, the House of Representatives passed the Protecting and Securing Florida's Coastline Act to permanently ban drilling off the coast of Florida with broad bipartisan support. Despite that vote and the economic and environmental damage left by the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster, it appears that the Department of the Interior (DOI) is preparing to open the door to oil and gas drilling off Florida's coasts shortly after the November 2020 election. As representatives from Florida, we are asking for clarification on DOI's plans for drilling off the coasts of our state.

Florida relies on coastlines unencumbered by oil and gas drilling to sustain its economy, preserve its marine life and natural resources, and protect our national security. This past April marked ten years since the Deepwater Horizon disaster, when we saw firsthand the destruction offshore drilling can have on our state. Our state and local economies cannot sustain another disaster like that – especially on top of the current economic struggles tied to the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, the eastern Gulf of Mexico is a critical testing and training area for our military, and the Department of Defense has stated clearly that the Gulf Test Range is an “irreplaceable national asset” for combat force readiness. Any oil and gas development would be an obstacle to military preparedness and national security.

Additionally, the people of Florida are also clearly opposed to oil and gas development off our coast. A constitutional amendment on Florida's November 2018 ballot to ban offshore drilling in state waters passed overwhelmingly. Here is objective proof that Floridians recognize that the state's economy depends on a pristine environment, and that offshore drilling threatens Florida's future.

In response to the June 10 *Politico* story, DOI's Press Secretary tweeted, “Current offshore plans do not expire until 2022, and @Interior does not plan to issue a new report in November.” In light of our strong interest to preserve and protect Florida's coasts, we request that you provide clarification through written answers to the following questions:

1. What is the status of the 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Proposed Program? Does DOI have a target date for its release?

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2. Is the Department still working on a new 5-year leasing program that would go into effect prior to the expiration of the current leasing program in 2022? If not, can you indicate whether the Department would consider not releasing a new leasing program that contains any offshore lease sales scheduled prior to the expiration of the 2017-2022 program?
3. Would the Department consider, when the Proposed Program is eventually issued, not including lease sales for any new areas in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic?
4. Would the Department consider supporting our bipartisan legislation, the Protecting and Securing Florida's Coastline Act of 2019, to permanently ban drilling off the coast of Florida?

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress



Francis Rooney  
Member of Congress



Darren Soto  
Member of Congress



Matt Gaetz  
Member of Congress

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Gus M. Bilirakis  
Member of Congress



Vern Buchanan  
Member of Congress



Charlie Crist  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Val Demings  
Member of Congress



Ted Deutch  
Member of Congress



Lois Frankel  
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Alcee L. Hastings  
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Al Lawson  
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Debbie Mucarsel-Powell  
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Stephanie Murphy  
Member of Congress

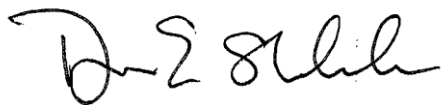


Bill Posey  
Member of Congress

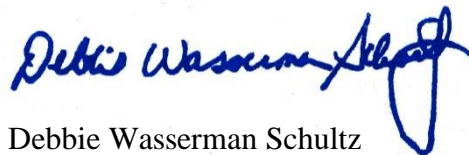


John H. Rutherford  
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Donna Shalala  
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
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