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[US reps worry ocean policy will block development](#)

Mary Pemberton
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ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Dozens of U.S. representatives sent a letter Monday to the head of the President's Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force with concerns that the policy will block offshore energy development and cost jobs.

Sixty-nine House members, including Alaska Rep. Don Young, signed the letter in which they responded to the task force's interim report released last month.

The task force is working on a national policy for governance of the country's oceans, coasts and Great Lakes. Two dozen senior policy members from numerous agencies are working on the national policy.

Washington Rep. Doc Hastings, the ranking Republican member of the House Natural Resources Committee, said it is important that the task force recognize multiple uses of the nation's oceans, from fishing to energy development to recreation.

"We can protect our oceans without inflicting more economic damage in the middle of a serious recession. Members from both sides of the aisle will strongly oppose any efforts by the administration to use this report as means of establishing a backdoor moratorium on offshore energy development," Hastings said in a release.

Rep. Bill Cassidy, a Republican from Louisiana, said the interim report "reflects an ideology that is at odds with American energy independence and job creation in the energy economy."

The letter was sent to Nancy Sutley, the ocean policy task force chairwoman. It was signed by 59 Republicans and 10 Democrats.

The letter says policies and principles laid out in the interim report focus heavily on

environmental stewardship while not sufficiently supporting economic development of ocean resources and recreational uses.

"We are particularly concerned about the task force's impact on our nation's ability to safely develop its own offshore energy, including oil, natural gas and renewable energy," it read.

New restrictions on energy development would cause prices to rise for consumers, negatively affect all Americans whose livelihoods depend on affordable energy and hurt Americans working in the offshore energy industry, it says.

The letter cites an American Energy Alliance report that says expanding drilling in the Outer Continental Shelf would generate 1.2 million jobs and \$70 billion in additional wages annually, while increasing economic output by \$8 trillion and \$2.2 trillion in total tax receipts.

Sutley appreciates the input, said Christine M. Glunz, spokeswoman for the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

"When President Obama established the Ocean Policy Task Force, he recognized that the demands on the ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes are intensifying and will continue to grow," she said.

Shell, which plans to drill exploratory wells next year on two leases in the Beaufort Sea off Alaska's north coast, also has reviewed the interim report. Shell spokesman Curtis Smith said the report makes little mention of energy or other economic issues and appears heavily weighted toward conservation and protection of the oceans.

"It's Shell's position that better balance is needed," he said.

Jim Ayers, vice president of Oceana, said he's also read the report and there is nothing in it to raise concerns about offshore energy development.

"This sounds like a bunch of people who have never heard of the Exxon Valdez," he said.

The Exxon Valdez oil tanker ran aground in Prince William Sound in 1989 and poured nearly 11 million gallons of crude resulting in the nation's worst oil spill.

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