

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

January 9, 2025

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Debra Haaland
Secretary of the Interior
United States Department of the Interior
1849 18th Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear President Biden and Secretary Haaland,

The American people deserve leadership that builds a legacy of strength and prosperity - not one of obstruction, squandered opportunities, and deliberate economic sabotage. Despite a specific promise made in July of this year to “lower costs for hardworking families, grow our economy,¹” your actions continue to do just the opposite. Your administration’s policies have put us on a dangerous path, where foreign adversaries dictate our energy future, our workers are left behind, and the progress we have made toward energy independence is deliberately undone.

Your decision to withdraw 625 million acres of federal waters along the Atlantic coast, the Pacific coast, the Gulf of Mexico, and portions of the northern Bering Sea from future oil and gas leasing is not only reckless but emblematic of a presidency more concerned with pandering to radical special interests than addressing the long-term and short-term needs of the American people. At a time when energy security, economic stability, and geopolitical strength should be top priorities, your decision is a dangerous and shortsighted abdication of leadership.

Since its inception in 1954, the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas program has been a cornerstone of American energy independence and economic security. Offshore energy development has generated hundreds of billions of dollars in federal and state revenues, a testament to its unmatched value to the nation. Before 2004, the program brought in an astonishing \$159 billion, including \$64 billion in bonuses, \$3 billion in rentals, \$89 billion in royalties, and \$3 billion in in-kind oil deliveries in lieu of royalties.² Over the past 20 years, it has added another \$140 billion to the federal treasury, underscoring its enduring importance to the American economy.³

Despite this unparalleled success, your administration has recklessly abandoned this vital program, jeopardizing its contributions to our nation’s prosperity. American offshore oil and gas has long supported hundreds of thousands of high-paying jobs, with an estimated 370,000 direct jobs sustained annually through 2040, prior to your decision.⁴ These jobs form a critical component of the 11 million direct and

¹ The White House, *Remarks by President Biden in Statement to the American People*, July 24, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2024/07/24/remarks-by-president-biden-in-statement-to-the-american-people/>

² Minerals Management Service (MMS). *Outer Continental Shelf Oil & Gas Leasing Procedures Document (Green Book)*. 2009. Accessed via Web Archive. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20090205060226/http://www.mms.gov/ld/PDFs/GreenBook-LeasingDocument.pdf>

³ U.S. Department of the Interior. *Revenue Data Query Tool*. Accessed January 5, 2025. Available at: <https://revenue.data.doi.gov/query-data/?dataType=Revenue>

⁴ Rigzone. *How Will Offshore GOM Oil Employment Shake Out?* October 22, 2020. Available at: https://www.rigzone.com/news/how_will_offshore_gom_oil_employment_shake_out-22-oct-2020-163633-article/

indirect oil and gas jobs across the United States. At the same time, OCS production has supplied nearly 20% of the nation's crude oil in recent years—a lifeline for energy security.⁵

Yet, with this unprecedented withdrawal equivalent to more than 25% of the total land area of the United States⁶ – an area equal to 1.8 billion football fields – you have deliberately crippled a proven driver of lower energy prices, economic strength, national security, and energy independence. This reckless decision ignores the essential programs funded by OCS revenues under the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA), including hurricane protection, coastal resilience, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and the Historic Preservation Fund.⁷ These funds do more than support Gulf Coast communities; they fortify the infrastructure and resilience of the entire nation while mitigating the runaway national debt.

Your withdrawal of these areas betrays decades of progress and abandons the workers and communities relying on offshore energy development for their livelihoods. By ceding ground to OPEC, Russia, China, and other foreign adversaries, you have put American energy security and economic stability at risk for the sake of fleeting political optics. This decision is not just a misstep—it is a willful act of sabotage against the American people and our future.

For two years, the American people waited for the release of the 5-Year National OCS Program, only for it to become the most pathetic in history—delayed, underwhelming, and maliciously drafted. The December release of a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) was far too late to prevent delays to Lease Sale 262, which BOEM officials have openly admitted will not take place in 2025, as your own plan required. With this withdrawal, your administration has effectively slammed the door on future development in critical regions, including the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Northern Bering Sea of Alaska.

Your administration's abuse of the Section 12 authority provided by the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) to justify this sweeping withdrawal highlights a blatant disregard for the statutory framework Congress designed to ensure balanced, predictable energy development. 43 U.S. Code § 1332 reads,

“The outer Continental Shelf is a vital national resource reserve held by the Federal Government for the public, which should be made available for expeditious and orderly development.”⁸

Your decision completely ignores the multiple-use principles mandated in OCSLA, and your choice to unilaterally override decades of congressional intent and precedent without any legislative action to support such a sweeping decision leaves Americans to question how such power can so easily subvert the nation's interests.

The withdrawal of the Northern Bering Sea, an area critical for Alaska's economy and subsistence communities, ignores the needs of Alaskans, who depend on responsible resource development to support their way of life. Instead, you have chosen to bow to out-of-state special interest groups while ignoring scientific and economic realities.

⁵ American Petroleum Institute (API). *Behind the 10.8 Million Stat: The People of American Oil and Natural Gas*. May 17, 2023. Available at: <https://www.api.org/news-policy-and-issues/blog/2023/05/17/behind-the-108-million-stat-the-people-of-american-oil-and-natural-gas>

⁶ Central Intelligence Agency. (n.d.). United States: Geography. In *The World Factbook*. Retrieved January 5, 2025, from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/usa/#geography>

⁷ Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM). *Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Revenue Data*. Accessed January 5, 2025. Available at: <https://www.boem.gov/oil-gas-energy/energy-economics/ocs-revenue>

⁸ 43 U.S. Code § 1332 (3)

History will remember this decision not as a triumph of conservation but as a retreat to radicalism, a misguided attempt to cement a legacy of obstruction at the expense of America's energy security. Energy production on the OCS is safer, cleaner, and more efficient than ever,⁹ yet your policies drive production overseas to nations with lower environmental standards, higher emissions, and no commitment to American values.¹⁰ Indeed, this action takes a knife to the heart of conservation funding in the United States, and raises the question of your true commitment to both the environmental and native communities you so wholeheartedly purport to value.

The House Committee on Natural Resources will not stand by as this administration jeopardizes American energy, economic, and conservation interests. To that end, the Committee expects to receive a response and the following items in your possession, custody, or control, in complete, unredacted, and electronic format, as soon as possible but no later than January 19, 2025:

1. All documents and communications, including predecisional memoranda and correspondence, related to the decision to withdraw any acreage from offshore oil and gas leasing between the Executive Office of the White House and the Department of the Interior that was finalized in the Memorandum on the Withdrawal of Certain Areas of the United States Outer Continental Shelf from Oil or Natural Gas Leasing dated January 6, 2025.
2. All documents and communications, including predecisional memoranda and correspondence, related to the decision to withdraw any acreage from offshore oil and gas leasing between the Executive Office of the White House, Department of the Interior, and outside stakeholder groups, including nonprofits, foreign governments, lobbying organizations, or the respective representatives of these entities.
3. Provide documents sufficient to demonstrate the political appointees and any employees of the Office of the Executive White House, Department of the Interior, and Council on Environmental Quality who have been involved in drafting the Memorandum on the Withdrawal of Certain Areas of the United States Outer Continental Shelf from Oil or Natural Gas Leasing as well as any post-employment recusal statements on file.
4. Provide documents sufficient to certify any analyses conducted on the economic, employment, and energy security impacts of this withdrawal. If no such analysis exists, provide justification for this glaring oversight.
5. Provide documents sufficient to detail the process under which this Memorandum on the Withdrawal of Certain Areas of the United States Outer Continental Shelf from Oil or Natural Gas Leasing undertook a public comment period and detail how this withdrawal will affect communities dependent on natural gas and oil development in Cook Inlet and other Alaskan regions, including Native subsistence economies, through product delivered to these regions, produced in Cook Inlet, or elsewhere in Alaska to make up for the dwindling natural gas production in the Cook Inlet, which your administration helped exacerbate.
6. Provide documents sufficient to project the impact of the Memorandum on the Withdrawal of Certain Areas of the United States Outer Continental Shelf from Oil or Natural Gas Leasing on

⁹ National Ocean Industries Association (NOIA). *Greenhouse Gas Emission Intensity of Crude Oil and Condensate Production Study*. May 2023. Available at: https://www.noia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/NOIA-Study-GHG-Emission-Intensity-of-Crude-Oil-and-Condensate-Production.pdf?utm_source=Mailchimp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ICF+study+emissions+

¹⁰ Reuters. *China Sets Up New State Body to Drill Deep for Oil and Gas Reserves*. July 1, 2024. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/china-sets-up-new-state-body-drill-deep-oil-gas-reserves-2024-07-01/>

GOMESA revenue streams, including funding for LWCF, HPF, hurricane protection, and coastal resilience programs, including the administration's proposals for recovering lost future revenues.

7. Provide documents sufficient to explain how this decision aligns with national security interests given the increased leverage it grants to OPEC, Russia, China, Venezuela, and other foreign actors eager to fill the void left by diminished U.S. production, if these areas were to experience exploration, drilling, and production of hydrocarbons, to the fullest extent possible.
8. Provide a certification memo with causation specifying the need to delay Lease Sale 262 as previously scheduled.
9. Provide the scientific justification for the decision, including data on resource potential in the withdrawn areas and the trade-offs of this policy.

In regard to this inquiry, the Committee specifically requests that the Department comply with all statutory record retention requirements, including but not limited to the Federal Records Act.

An attachment to this letter provides additional instructions for responding to the requests from the Committee on Natural Resources. Please direct any questions to the Majority staff for the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee at (202)225-2761 or HNRR.Oversight@mail.house.gov. Under House Rule X, the Committee on Natural Resources has "general oversight" of any matter relating to its jurisdiction, including all matters concerning the programs, operations, and regulatory responsibilities of BOEM and ONRR. We look forward to your cooperation, and will pursue every necessary avenue to hold your administration accountable to ensure that America's energy future remains in American hands.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources



Pete Stauber
Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources



Paul Gosar, M.D.
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations

CC:

Elizabeth Klein, Director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)
Howard Cantor, Director of the Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR)