

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 16, 2017

Ryan Zinke, Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

On June 28, 2017, your agency released a Request for Information, initiating the first stage in “revisiting” the existing, just completed 5-year offshore drilling schedule for 2017-2022. As Members of Congress opposed to oil and gas leasing in the U.S. Arctic, we urge you to continue to adhere to the recently approved 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program (Program) and cease efforts that violate the permanent protections against expanded oil and gas drilling put in place last year for the vast majority of the still unspoiled, unique Arctic Ocean. Any effort to impose drilling in this region runs counter to sound public process, statutory authority, the science, and responsible use of public resources.

The Arctic Ocean is a vulnerable, harsh, and unpredictable region that faces the dual threats of industrial pollution and climate change. The Arctic is home to some of our most iconic and unique wildlife, including polar bears, walrus and bowhead whales. Its healthy oceans are crucial to the customary and traditional ways of life in the region, providing subsistence resources for many generations.

An oil spill anywhere in this region would be both devastating and impossible to clean-up. And BOEM itself identified a 75% likelihood of such a spill occurring from production under the last Chukchi lease sale. Worse, compared to the Deepwater Horizon disaster - which took place in the infrastructure-rich Gulf region and still took 87 days to stop –any development in the Arctic Ocean would take place approximately 1,000 miles from the nearest U.S. Coast Guard station, throwing one of the world’s most fragile ecosystems into jeopardy.

Moreover, there is simply no reason to put these ocean waters and all they support at risk. The fossil fuel industry has received taxpayer handouts for decades and has stockpiled decades worth of oil—enough to last well-beyond the transition to clean energy needed to address climate change and keep America internationally competitive.

Further, the 2017-2022 Program was developed carefully, following the procedures and standards of Section 18 of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, starting with a Request for Information published on June 16, 2014, and finishing over two and a half years later with the signing of the Record of Decision on January 17, 2017. During the process, BOEM received over 3.4 million comments and held 13 public meetings across the country. In recognition of the strong opposition of local residents, citizens, scientists, and reflecting exhaustive analysis, BOEM did not include any lease sales in the Arctic Ocean in the final Program.

In addition, over 125 million acres of this still unspoiled, fragile ocean—held in trust for this and future generations—was permanently preserved from any future leasing utilizing a statutory provision that is purely protective. This provision authorizes removal of outer continental shelf lands from future federal mineral leasing or sale and nothing else—least of all removing protections. Thus, any leasing in these protected waters in the Arctic not only flies in the face of public will, it falls outside legal authority.

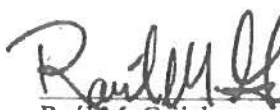
Finally, the majority of Americans—for whom these waters are held in trust—support permanently protecting the Arctic, and the entire Atlantic as well, and instead investing in clean energy that creates jobs and cuts pollution.

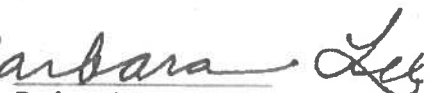
As you conduct a review of our nation's existing oil and gas leases, we again strongly urge you to reject proposals to open new offshore areas to drilling and exploration off our coasts including the Arctic Ocean. The risks are simply too high, and the consequences too severe. It is time to preserve and protect this vital part of America's national heritage for future generations.

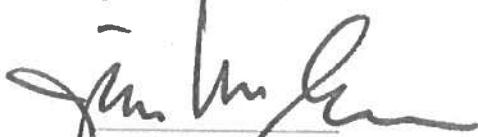
We look forward to working with you during your tenure as Secretary, and thank you for your attention to this letter.


Sincerely,



Jayed Huffman
Member of Congress

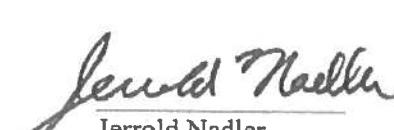

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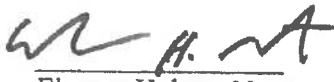

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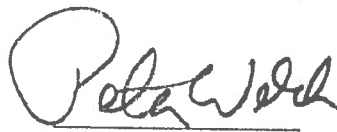

Peter A. DeFazio
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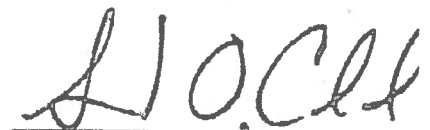

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