

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 15th, 2016

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

Dear Secretary Jewell:

On behalf of the undersigned Members of Congress, we write to comment on your administration's proposed 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program. The OCS plan constitutes one of the most important remaining opportunities for this administration to align our nation's long-term energy supply decisions with our commitments to a clean energy economy, thus reinforcing our commitment to the international accord reached last year in Paris to cut climate changing emissions, as well as last month's agreement with Canada to jointly pursue emissions reductions and protection of the Arctic and its peoples.

To that end, we appreciate the administration's foresight in excluding the Atlantic from development in the recently released proposed 2017-2022 Five-Year Leasing Program. We urge you to build on this by removing the Arctic Ocean sales from the Proposed Program. Further, we urge the administration to once again set the pace in the fight against global climate change by ensuring these vital and unique waters are permanently taken off the table from any future oil and gas development.

As this administration laid out in the US-Canada Joint Agreement, our nation should be focusing on achieving strong conservation goals for the Arctic and making decisions to develop oil and gas resources only when the highest safety and environmental standards are met, including national and global climate and environmental goals. To meet these goals, the Arctic Ocean should be permanently protected from oil drilling, not used to drill for more fossil fuels that we will not need—and must not burn—if we are serious about powering our future with clean energy. Continued inclusion of the Arctic in the 5-year plan would take our nation backwards in its commitment to address climate change and facilitate the transition to clean energy.

Scientific consensus tells us that the vast majority of known fossil fuel reserves must be left undeveloped if we are to avoid the worst effects of climate change, and the development of Arctic Ocean oil and gas has specifically been identified as incompatible with the President's commitment to keep the planet's average temperature rise under 2° Celsius. Moreover, oil from Arctic Ocean drilling—if viable at all—would not be available for years and, once online, would risk locking the American People into a contract guaranteeing carbon pollution for decades. In contrast, ending oil and gas development in the Arctic would send a powerful international signal that the United States is committed to investing its resources in a climate safe, clean-energy future.

Arctic Ocean drilling would not only make climate change worse, it would also put our marine ecosystems and ocean-reliant communities at risk of a major oil spill. The Arctic region is home to vibrant coastal communities, iconic wildlife, and some of the last wild places relatively untouched by industrial development. Healthy marine ecosystems are vitally important to communities, culture, and all other aspects of life along the Arctic coast. According to Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's own study, the development of new leases in the Chukchi Sea would come with a 75 percent chance of at least one significant oil spill. Arctic Ocean lease sales for 2017-2022 represent a tacit endorsement of unacceptable levels of irreversible habitat destruction.


Last year, your agency made several important and forward-looking decisions about the Arctic region. The cancellation of Chukchi Sea Lease Sale 237 and Beaufort Sea Lease Sale 242 and the rejection of Suspension of Operation requests from Shell and Statoil were important steps forward. Additionally, President Obama's withdrawal of specific areas of America's Arctic Ocean from oil and gas leasing is a significant first step toward long term protections for the most sensitive and important marine waters and coasts in America's Arctic.

Excluding the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas from future leasing will help protect these areas and would build on this Administration's leadership in combating climate change. Again, we appreciate recent decisions in the Arctic Ocean and urge that you seize this moment to remove these areas from the 2017-2022 program and instead grant them the permanent protection they so richly deserve. Please take bold action to ensure the fate of the Arctic Ocean is not left to an uncertain future, but instead secured now for the sake of this and future generations.

Sincerely,



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress



Matthew Cartwright
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
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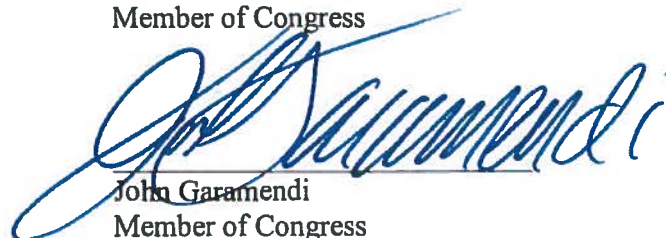
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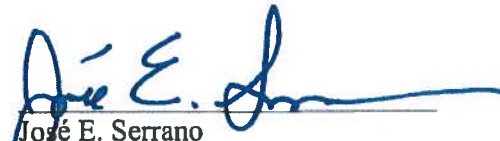
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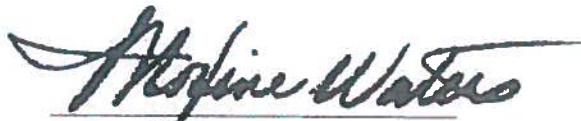
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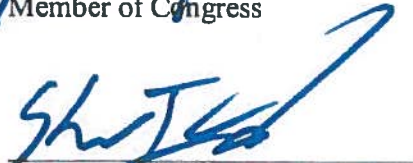
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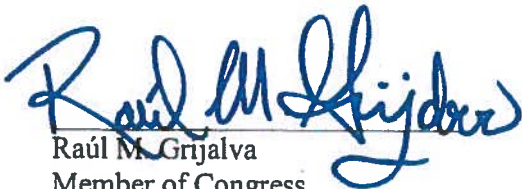
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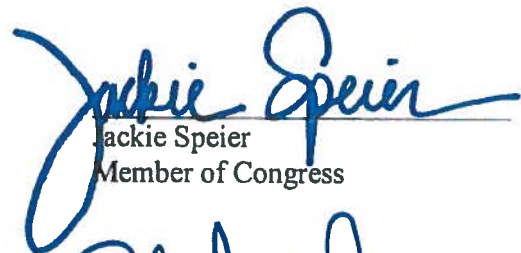
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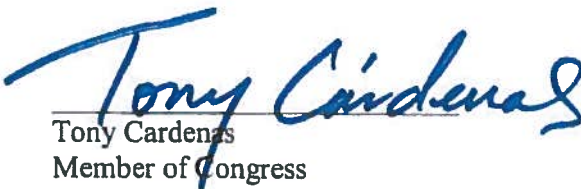
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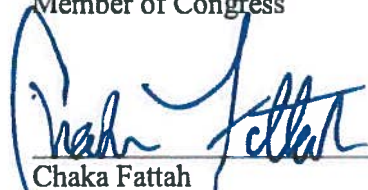
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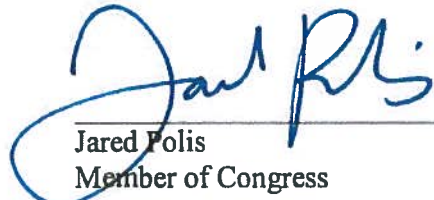
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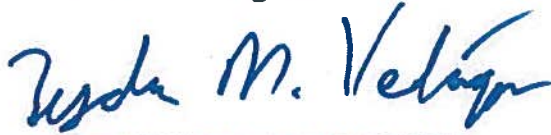
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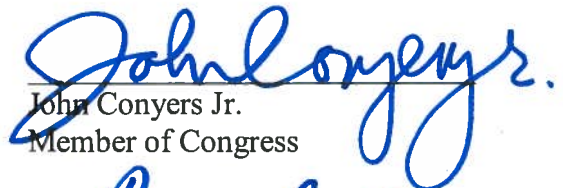
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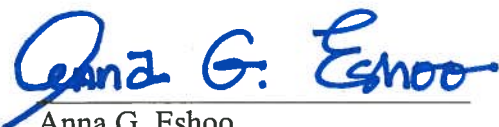
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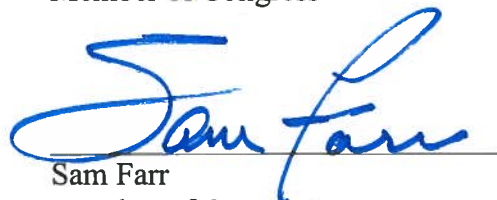
Lloyd Doggett
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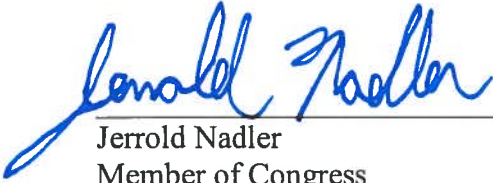
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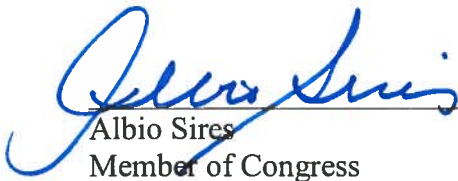
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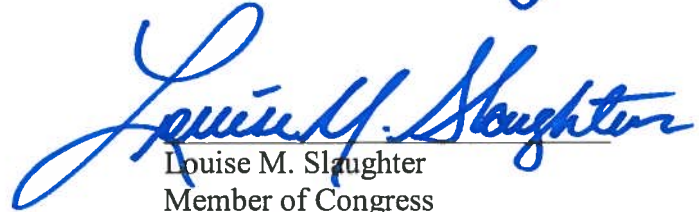
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Albio Sires
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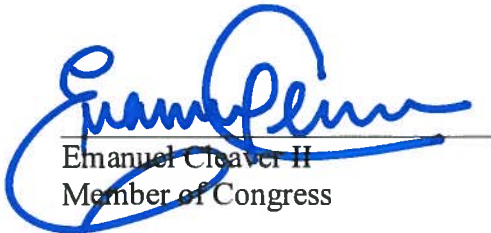
Louise M. Slaughter
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Ami Bera, M.D.
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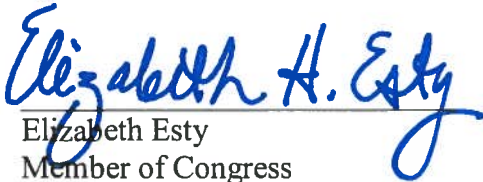
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