

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 16, 2019

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

Dear Acting Secretary Bernhardt:

One of the most striking features of the current government shutdown, brought about entirely by the President's insistence on building an entirely unnecessary border wall, is the way the administration has bent over backwards to ensure that the pain of the shutdown falls only on ordinary Americans and the environment, and not on the oil and gas industry. While 800,000 federal workers are missing paychecks, Native Americans are at risk of losing access to food and health care, travelers face extended delays in airports, and our national parks are piling up with trash and seeing the destruction of irreplaceable natural resources—to name just a few of the numerous ways the Trump shutdown temper tantrum is taking a toll on this country—your Department has continued to hold public meetings on oil and gas development on the North Slope of Alaska, refused to extend the comment period for leasing the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and opened up Bureau of Land Management field offices to allow drilling permits to continue to be issued.

Today we learned that the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) updated its contingency plan on January 8, 2019, to allow employees to continue working on seismic permits, upcoming offshore lease sales, and the five-year offshore oil and gas leasing program. This is an outrageous step, and the justifications provided in the BOEM contingency plan—that the employees are needed, “to comply with the Administration’s America First energy strategy,” and that, “failure to hold these [offshore] sales would have a negative impact to the Treasury and negatively impact investment in the U.S. Offshore Gulf of Mexico.”—are farcical and make it clear that the administration cares only about the impacts on its favorite industry and not about workers, their families, and ordinary Americans.

We urge you to reverse these actions immediately and prioritize health, safety, and the protection of natural resources over the needs of the oil and gas industry. If you refuse, we insist that you come to Capitol Hill this week for a detailed briefing providing the legal justification for what appears to be a violation of the Antideficiency Act, and providing information on where the funding for these activities is coming from, how it is being spent, and what the consequences are of spending that funding during the shutdown.

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If you have any questions about this request, and to schedule a briefing, please contact the Natural Resources Committee staff at (202) 225-6065.

Sincerely,


Raúl M. Grijalva
Chairman
House Committee
on Natural Resources


Betty McCollum
Chair-designate
House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies


Alan S. Lowenthal
Member of Congress

cc: Dr. Walter Cruickshank, Acting Director, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
Mr. Brian Steed, Deputy Director, Policy and Programs, Bureau of Land Management