

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 10, 2018

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

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We write today in opposition to the proposed rule changes to the Well Control Rule (FR 2018-09305) published on May 11, 2018. In the aftermath of the *Deepwater Horizon* explosion in 2010, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) adopted several recommendations from multiple investigation teams and incorporated certain industry technical standards to improve the safety of offshore operations. It is critical these standards, enhanced blowout preventer (BOP) well design and modified well-control requirements, remain fully intact.

Less than a decade ago, our country experienced the worst environmental disaster in its history when the *Deepwater Horizon* oil rig exploded and sank, leading to millions of barrels of oil pouring unchecked into the Gulf of Mexico and polluting our shores. This tragedy resulted in a loss of eleven lives and billions of dollars in fishing and tourism for Gulf Coast economies; the contamination of about 1,100 miles of coastal marshes and beaches; and huge impacts on dolphins, seabirds, and other wildlife in the entire Gulf of Mexico. Since then, the offshore oil and gas industry has fully rebounded, with record levels of offshore oil production and increased number of leases made available in deeper and ultra-deep water. The need for these safety standards to protect our coastal economies from another oil spill has never been stronger.

The Well Control Rule, as finalized in 2016, helped to make substantive improvements to the safety of offshore oil and gas operations on the Outer Continental Shelf, implementing many of the recommendations made by numerous expert panels that investigated the tragic *Deepwater Horizon* blowout and oil spill of 2010. Unfortunately, the recent proposal to weaken these safety measures risks our coastal economies and communities. Removing real-time monitoring requirements, eliminating the need for third-party verification organizations to be approved by the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), and allowing companies to submit equipment failures anonymously – effectively making the requirement voluntary – are all actions that will increase the risk of oil spills and reduce the public's confidence that drilling activities are being done safely.

Operators in the Outer Continental Shelf have not demonstrated that they can adequately supervise themselves to prevent similar threats that caused the *Deepwater Horizon* blowout. In fact, in recent surprise inspections by BSEE on around 40 offshore platforms, serious and sometimes life-threatening problems were found at many of the sites, underscoring the need to hold the industry

accountable. We must ensure that critical last-resort equipment, blowout preventers, are held to safe and reliable standards, as provided in the well-control rule. As the blowout preventer is the very piece of equipment that failed in April 2010, we should be strengthening and preserving these protections, not eliminating them.

While the Department of the Interior took a number of positive steps in the immediate aftermath of that disaster, such as implementing new safety standards and establishing an independent offshore oil and gas regulator, more work remains. The Department of Interior should not be rolling back offshore safety standards that further put our coastal economies and communities at risk. As your agency moves forward with consideration of these proposed roll-backs for offshore drilling safety, we urge you to prioritize the economic vitality of our clean coastlines and wildlife resources by keeping the 2016 Well Control Rule in place.

Sincerely,



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



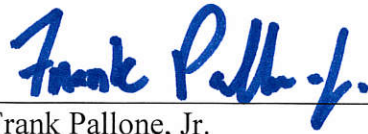
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Salud O. Carbajal
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Frank Pallone, Jr.
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Suzanne Bonamici
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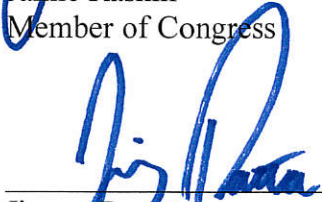
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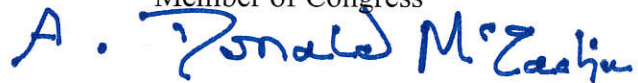
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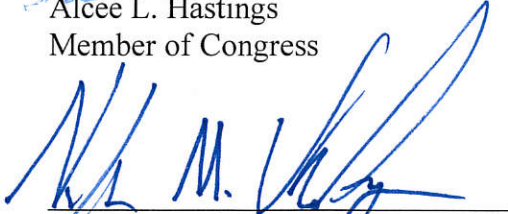
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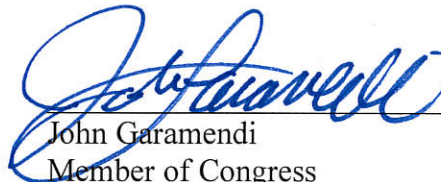
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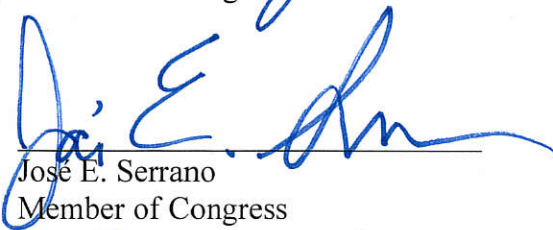
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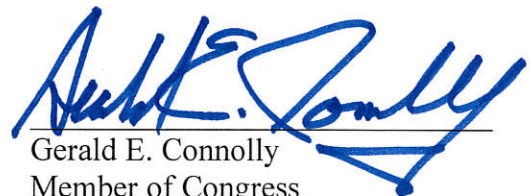
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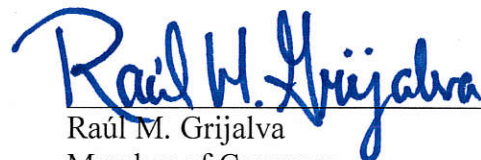
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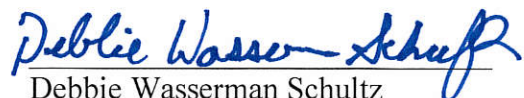
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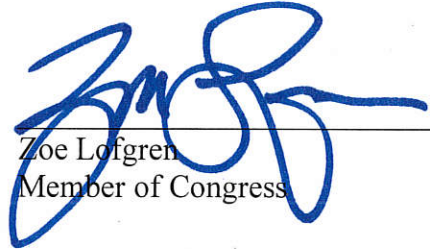
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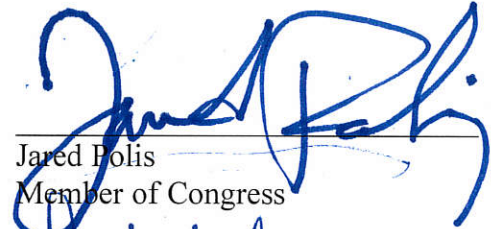
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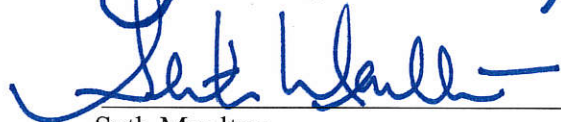
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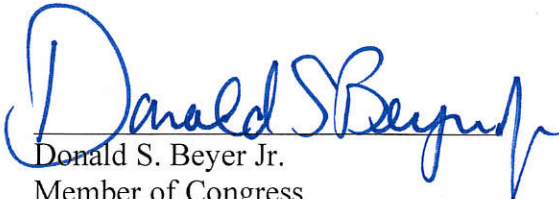
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