

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 19, 2018

The Honorable James N. Mattis
Secretary of Defense
1100 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Mattis:

As the Department of the Interior (DOI) recently announced its draft National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program (National OCS Program) for 2019-2024, we respectfully request the Department of Defense's (DOD) input to ensure this proposal does not adversely affect military readiness and training activities off of Florida's coasts. While Secretary Zinke recently announced that Florida would be "off the table" for new drilling, the DOI draft proposal still includes the possibility for both drilling and seismic testing off Florida's coast in all three OCS planning areas surrounding Florida. The Eastern Gulf of Mexico (EGOM) Planning Area, the South Atlantic Planning Area, and the Straits of Florida Planning Area, however, are all home to strategically-vital military activity and training areas that will only become more important with future advancements in aircraft and weapons technologies.

Eastern Gulf of Mexico Planning Area

In a recent letter, U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff, General David L. Golfein states "[t]he complex of eastern Gulf of Mexico operating areas and warning areas provides critical opportunities for advanced weapons testing and joint training exercises. The moratorium on oil and gas leasing, pre-leasing, and other related activities ensures that these vital military readiness activities may be conducted without interference and is critical to their continuation."

As you are well aware, this established restriction enables the unique testing and training of military capabilities within the 180,000 square mile Joint Gulf Range Complex as well as 17 miles of adjacent dedicated shoreline and 724 square miles of nearby land ranges. Any encroachment on this range through drilling or predrilling activities could prove detrimental to our nation's security and military's readiness including utilization by joint U.S. Forces for multiple training evolutions to include: F-22 and F-35 supersonic air combat training, electronic warfare training, air-to-air and air-to-ground training, 5th and 6th Generation weapons systems training, Naval sub-surface, surface-to-surface testing, hypersonic weapons testing, and mine and counter-mine operations, to name a few, largely coordinated out of Tyndall AFB and the Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City Division. The necessary training and application of weapons systems mentioned is contingent upon the space afforded by the Joint Gulf Range with command and control of the airspace, including the integration with civilian air traffic through the area, coordinated out of Eglin AFB.

South Atlantic Planning Area

Along the northern half of Florida's East Coast, the U.S. Air Force's Eastern Range, headquartered at Patrick Air Force base, spans across a 10,000-mile long stretch of ocean and is

used by Cape Canaveral Air Force Station and Kennedy Space Center to conduct space launches. This range, operated by the 45th Space Wing, has supported more than 3,500 launches to date and is essential for testing of the nuclear deterrence through the operational evaluation of submarine-launch nuclear ballistic missiles. Additionally, the range's 15 million square miles of instrumented airspace allows the United States to continue to have assured access to space, a vital but underappreciated commodity in this time of relative global peace. While this range is essential to national security space missions, it is equally essential for NASA and commercial space missions as well.

The seabed in this region includes a permanent undersea instrumentation and hydrophone installation used in high density submarine, surface ship and helicopter anti-surface/anti-submarine warfare operations as part of DOD's training. These waters provide an ideal location for instrumented seabed training, torpedo firing exercises, and live naval surface gunnery which are necessary for U.S. fleet operations which would be jeopardized by any exploratory activities.

Straits of Florida Planning Area

Along the southern half of Florida's East Coast, naval fleet underwater operations, test and evaluation operations in addition to the open-air range operated out of Naval Air Station Key West provide the U.S. military a realistic environment for combat readiness capabilities. Just last year, the Navy completed its 100,000th sortie using the Tactical Combat Training System (TCTS) at Naval Air Station (NAS) Key West, marking the most sorties flown on naval ranges using the system. As the nation's southernmost range, the Key West Tactical Training Range supports high fidelity training used by fleet carrier air wings, strike fighter squadrons and Navy F/A-18, EA-18G and F-35 fleet replacement squadrons through the use of more than 32,000 square miles of unencumbered trackable airspace.

We seek DOD's assessment in these vital areas and request that you work with the DOI to yield an interagency agreement to establish a coordinated process by which the relevant agencies can identify and exclude areas from Geological and Geophysical activities in advance of proposed five-year program periods. This would allow DOD to have the certainty necessary to continue its long term investments in the military ranges off of Florida's coasts that are vital to our military readiness and national security.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you on this matter.

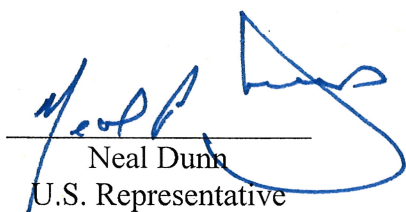
Sincerely,

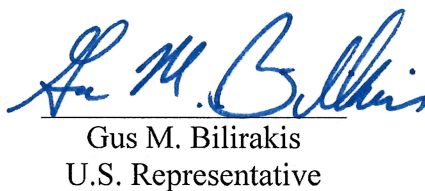


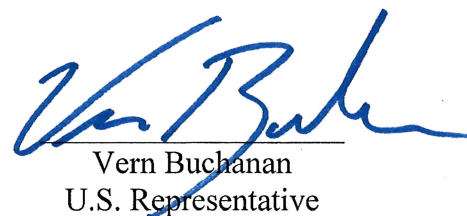
Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



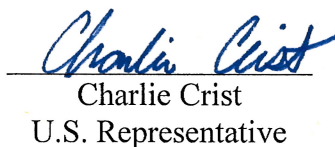
Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator

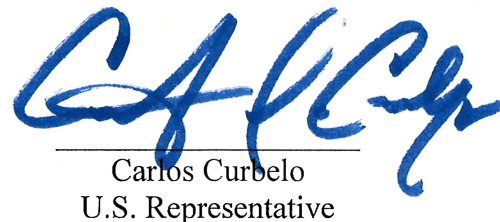

Neal Dunn
U.S. Representative

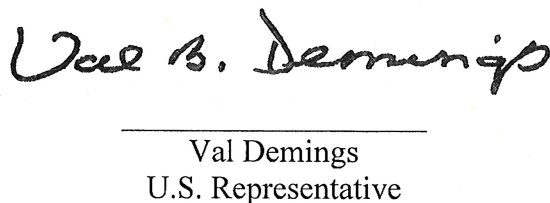

Gus M. Bilirakis
U.S. Representative


Vern Buchanan
U.S. Representative


Kathy Castor
U.S. Representative

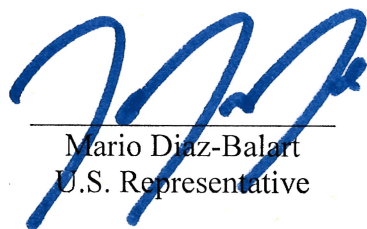

Charlie Crist
U.S. Representative

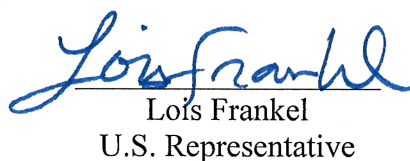

Carlos Curbelo
U.S. Representative


Val Demings
U.S. Representative

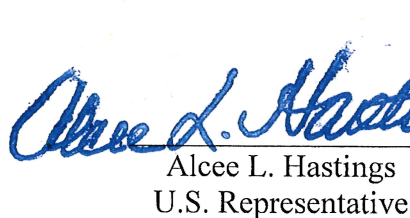

Ron DeSantis
U.S. Representative

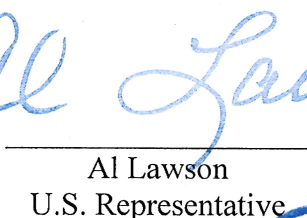

Theodore Deutch
U.S. Representative

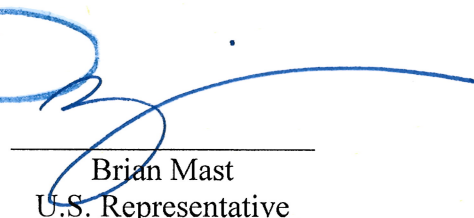

Mario Diaz-Balart
U.S. Representative

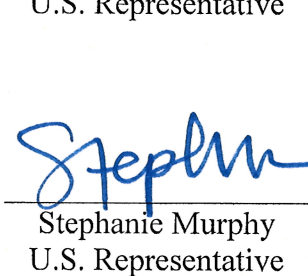

Lois Frankel
U.S. Representative

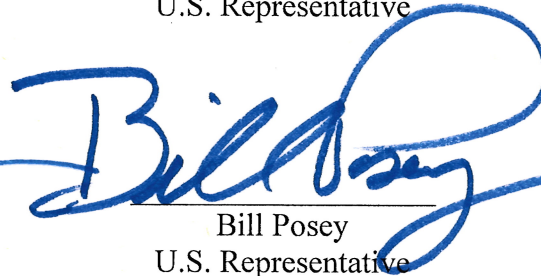

Matt Gaetz
U.S. Representative

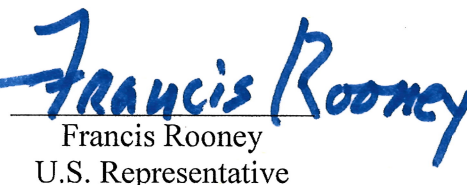

Alcee L. Hastings
U.S. Representative

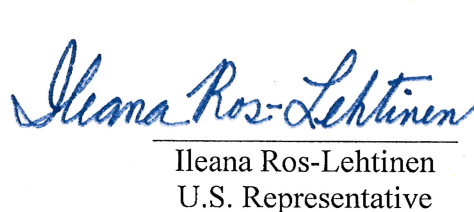

Al Lawson
U.S. Representative

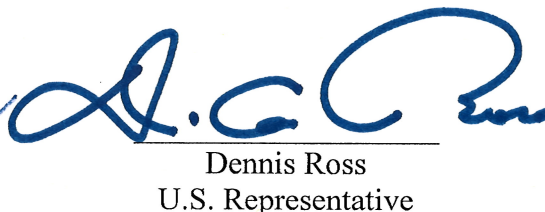

Brian Mast
U.S. Representative

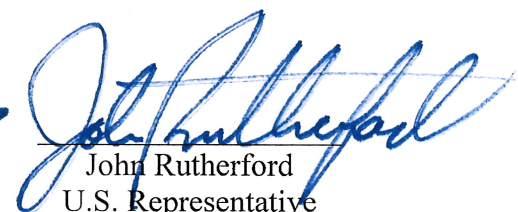

Stephanie Murphy
U.S. Representative

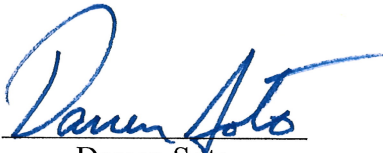

Bill Posey
U.S. Representative


Francis Rooney
U.S. Representative


Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
U.S. Representative


Dennis Ross
U.S. Representative

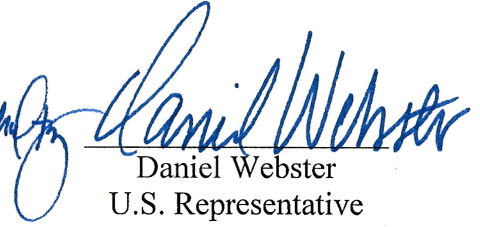

John Rutherford
U.S. Representative



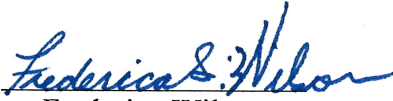
Darren Soto
U.S. Representative



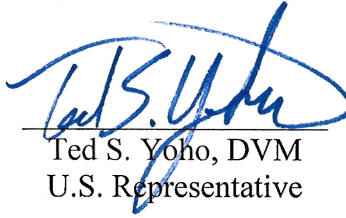
Debbie Wasserman Schultz
U.S. Representative



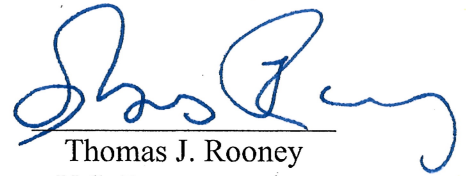
Daniel Webster
U.S. Representative



Frederica Wilson
U.S. Representative



Ted S. Yoho, DVM
U.S. Representative



Thomas J. Rooney
U.S. Representative