



United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

July 31, 2014

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

I'm writing to express my strong opposition to oil and gas drilling and seismic testing off the Atlantic Coast of Florida. Such drilling is incompatible with Florida's coastal economy, space launches, military bases, and marine ecosystems. As your department begins the process for developing the Five Year Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2017-2022, I urge you to maintain the longstanding protections against offshore oil and gas drilling in the waters off the Florida's Atlantic coastline. Leaders in St. Johns County have also voiced their concerns to your agency. I have attached their letters of opposition.

Over four years have passed since the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill disaster, which took the lives of 11 rig workers and spilled more than 4.9 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. Floridians are well aware of what an oil spill in the region could do, from spoiling beaches that attract tourists from all over the world to damaging productive fisheries and coastal communities. For instance, a recent report from Visit Jacksonville noted that tourism is responsible for more than \$1.5 billion in visitor spending to the area in 2013. Our tourism economy relies on clean beaches and healthy coastal ecosystems, and the Interior Department should carefully coordinate on the impacts of oil and gas development with the resource scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Even exploration makes little sense off areas surrounding Kennedy Space Center and Patrick Air Force Base. This is where the testing for NASA's heavy lift rocket is set to begin in December 2014. Oil and gas production would disrupt ongoing national security and research mission at coastal military installations The Jacksonville Naval Air Station Naval Air supports U.S. and allied forces specializing in anti-submarine warfare.

Finally, your agency is charged with both balancing the energy needs of this country and protecting our natural resources. Also implicit in this responsibility is the return to the taxpayer. The current Five Year Program makes more than 75 percent of the offshore oil and gas resources in federal waters available for development, but oil and gas companies still only produce on less than a quarter of the available offshore leases. The Department should aggressively encourage the development of the millions of acres already available for leasing

before offering a single acre more. Lastly, before you consider offering up new areas for oil and gas production, I urge you to finalize your department's rule updating safety standards for blowout preventers and other well controls.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.