

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 24, 2017

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

Dear Secretary Zinke,

As members of the Florida congressional delegation, we are writing to make clear our strong opposition to offshore oil drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico. It's our understanding that your department may be considering a new Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2017-2022. If you do choose to draft a new plan, we strongly urge you to keep the eastern Gulf off limits.

Drilling in this area threatens Florida's multi-billion-dollar, tourism-driven economy and is incompatible with the military training and weapons testing that occurs there.

In 2006, Congress passed the Gulf of Mexico Energy and Security Act (P.L. 109-432), which created a moratorium on drilling in most of the eastern Gulf of Mexico – including all areas east of the Military Mission Line.

It's been nearly seven years since the *Deepwater Horizon* explosion fifty miles off the coast of Louisiana claimed the lives of eleven men and ruined an entire tourism season for the Gulf states. And we still don't know the full extent of the damage done to marine life such as dolphins and sea turtles.

This tragedy was a painful reminder that Florida's beaches and economy are at risk even when oil rigs are hundreds of miles away from its shores.

In addition to its economic value, the eastern Gulf of Mexico provides a critical testing and training range for our nation's military – the largest such training area in the United States. For example, pilots at Eglin Air Force Base in Pensacola, Florida, use the open space to train with the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jets.

In 2015, the Department of Defense reiterated its opposition to offshore drilling activities in this vital training area. As a former Navy SEAL, you understand the importance of ensuring that the men and women of our armed forces have access to the best training opportunities available.

We expect that as our nation's newest Interior Secretary you will follow both the letter and the spirit of the law that currently bans drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, and we strongly urge you to heed the recommendations of the Department of Defense and coastal communities by keeping offshore drilling rigs out of the area.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson

Charlie Crist

Stephan

Dan Webster

Lois Frankel

Van Buren

Ilana Ros-Lehtinen

Alcee L. Hastings

Dawn Aoto

Francis Romney

Wae B. Demunig

Al Lawson

Debbie Wasserman Schultz

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Kathy Castor

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Frederica S Wilson
