

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 18, 2018

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

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We write to express strong opposition to the proposed rollback (83 Fed. Reg. 22128) of the Blowout Preventer Systems and Well Control Rule (81 Fed. Reg. 25888), which is critical to improving the safety of offshore oil and gas operations and protecting our coasts from oil spills. The Administration's proposal would erode key safety and environmental protections, which we fear would put our \$150 billion dollar American coastal economy at great risk to oil spills.

April 20 of this year marked the eighth anniversary of the tragic Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, in which 11 workers were killed and 4 million barrels of oil were spewed into the Gulf of Mexico. After over \$65 billion of damage and multiple bipartisan Congressional hearings on the Deepwater Horizon tragedy, new protections were put in place to ensure this type of disaster never happens again. Many of those protections came in the form of the Blowout Preventer Systems and Well Control Rule.

The Blowout Preventer Systems and Well Control Rule, which was finalized in 2016, set minimum standards that the oil and gas industry must meet when conducting drilling operations. The move by your Department to undermine those protections is endangering the lives of oil workers, posing a serious threat to the environment, and imposing enormous potential liability on taxpayers by ignoring safety. Specifically, the rulemaking proposes several changes related to blowout preventer systems. The blowout preventer used by the Deepwater Horizon was found to be a critical failure, precipitating the disaster. Instead of strengthening requirements for blowout preventer systems, the Trump Administration's proposed rule reduces requirements for the design, operation, testing, maintenance, and inspection of blowout preventer systems. The Initial Regulatory Impact Analysis states that these revisions are for "providing cost relief to oil and gas companies operating on the Outer Continental Shelf," not to improve the safety of offshore operations.

It is immensely concerning that the Initial Regulatory Impact Analysis found that reducing safety requirements somehow "would not negatively impact worker safety or the environment." More troubling than that faulty logic, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement should be focused on increasing worker safety and environmental protection instead of wasting time to develop rules that provide no improvement to safety or the environment.

Rolling back these critical protections is not only irresponsible, it is dangerous. Your proposed rollback of the Blowout Preventer Systems and Well Control Rule is not in the best interest of workers, taxpayers, and the environment. Instead of throwing out common-sense safeguards, we should be working to incorporate more lessons learned from tragedies like Deepwater Horizon to improve safety, oil spill prevention, and response. We urge you to abandon this proposal to weaken the Blowout Preventer Systems and Well Control Rule and instead focus on prioritizing the health and safety of our economy and our environment.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Bill Nelson
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator




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Sheldon Whitehouse
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Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

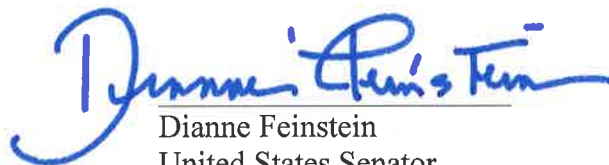

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