

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 3, 2016

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

Dear Secretary Jewell:

We are writing in regards to the proposed 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program and the subsequent effects on our nation's climate goals. We urge that the upcoming five year OCS leasing program refrain from opening any new fossil fuel reserves for development in order to keep with the President's commitment to keep the planet's average temperature rise under 2° Celsius. We believe that in order to maintain consistent climate policy, fossil fuel reserves in the OCS program should be permanently protected from new development.

In January 2015, the Department of Interior released a Draft Proposed Program (DPP) for the 2017-2022 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program. The DPP included three planning areas in the Gulf of Mexico, two in the Atlantic, and three in Alaska. While we are pleased the DPP did not open new carbon reserves off the Pacific Coast, the proposed planning areas still encompass nearly 80% of estimated undiscovered and technically available oil and gas resources on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf, and have the potential to unlock the emissions of 90 billion barrels of crude oil and 405 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

According to the most current science, the world has approximately 1,000 Gigatons of CO₂ emissions left before it hits the 2° Celsius warming threshold. The International Energy Agency estimates that if the world continues its current emissions course, we will exhaust our carbon budget by 2040, highlighting the pressing need to stop the development of new fossil fuel energy sources. Given the urgent timeline, it is even more important that most untapped reserves, such as oil in the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, stay in the ground in order to avoid 2° Celsius of warming.

While we applaud the Administration's efforts to combat climate change through the Clean Power Plan and other initiatives, we are troubled by the inherent contradiction in the Department of Interior's proposal to expand the leasing of public waters and facilitate the development of new fossil fuels reserves.

Our nation's federal public waters should be managed for the benefit of the American public, and unlocking new carbon reserves in the Atlantic and Arctic Ocean, as well as continuing to offer new leases in the Gulf of Mexico, many of which have the potential to produce oil and gas for decades into the future, runs counter to the best interests of this nation. The proposed expansion of the 2017-2022 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program would contradict the President's climate

goals, and unnecessarily threaten local communities, resources, and ecosystems, all the while damaging the global climate.

We strongly urge the Department of the Interior to critically examine the impact on climate change from expanded oil and gas production in the subsequent stages of developing the 2017-2022 plan. Given the prevailing science and critical need to quickly reduce carbon emissions, we believe it is imperative that the federal government does not offer new leases, and make every effort to terminate existing, nonproducing leases, for fossil fuel development in public waters in the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

We request that you report back to Congress on how your agency plans to incorporate climate change into the 2017-2022 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program, and explain how expanding fossil fuel development in federal waters complies with the Administration's commitment to mitigate global climate change. We ask that you provide this information before your agency releases the Proposed Final Program and Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the 2017-2022 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Thank you for your consideration.

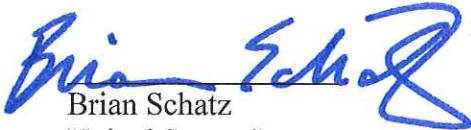
Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



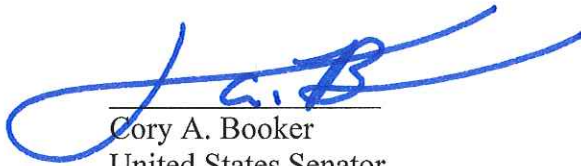
Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



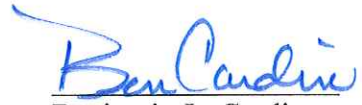
Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator