

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 2, 2022

Dear Secretary Haaland,

Thank you for your leadership in addressing the climate crisis, supporting U.S. public lands and waters conservation, and reforming an archaic federal oil and gas leasing program that has harmed taxpayers, wildlife, and local communities for decades. The actions you have spearheaded over the last sixteen months as Secretary have been a welcome and necessary change from those pursued under the previous administration. We now urge you to take the next step in advancing these critical priorities supported by the Biden administration by adopting a new final National Outer Continental Shelf Offshore Oil and Gas Leasing Program (“five-year plan” or “program”) with no lease sales off our coasts.

In January 2021, the Biden administration paused all new oil and gas lease sales on U.S. public lands and waters while the Department of the Interior completed a comprehensive review of Federal oil and gas permitting and leasing practices. Thank you for your leadership in carrying out this leasing pause and for conducting a review of the federal oil and gas program that culminated in the report and set of recommendations released this past November.¹ While the report regrettably did not examine how federal leasing contributes to climate change, it did identify numerous shortcomings in the onshore and offshore oil and gas programs, such as minimal financial assurance requirements, outdated fiscal terms, and inadequate public engagement. When the extent of the needed offshore reforms is combined with the climate impacts of new leasing, the only logical conclusion is that the next five-year plan should have no lease sales.

The Biden administration has laid out a bold vision for how the nation should respond to the global climate crisis and has established several significant U.S. emissions targets for the coming years and decades, including a 50-52 percent reduction from 2005 levels in economy-wide net greenhouse gas emissions in 2030, a carbon-free electricity sector by 2035, and a net-zero economy no later than 2050.² The Interior Department can and must play a critical role in achieving these ambitious targets by siting clean energy projects on public lands, growing a U.S. offshore wind industry, protecting more lands to permanently store carbon dioxide, and limiting new fossil fuel leasing. We have already made remarkable progress on many of these fronts. Thanks to your leadership, since January 2021, the Interior Department has approved over 120 renewable energy projects on public land and the nation’s first two commercial-scale offshore wind projects in federal waters have broken ground.³

¹ “Interior Department Report Finds Significant Shortcomings in Oil and Gas Leasing Programs.” *U.S. Department of the Interior*. November 26, 2021. <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-report-finds-significant-shortcomings-oil-and-gas-leasing-programs>

² “Fact Sheet: President Biden sets 2030 greenhouse gas pollution reduction target aimed at creating good-paying union jobs and securing U.S. leadership on clean energy technologies.” *The White House*. April 22, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/22/fact-sheet-president-biden-sets-2030-greenhouse-gas-pollution-reduction-target-aimed-at-creating-good-paying-union-jobs-and-securing-u-s-leadership-on-clean-energy-technologies/>

³ “Interior Department Outlines Roadmap for Continued Renewable Energy Progress on Public Lands.” *U.S. Department of the Interior*. April 20, 2022. <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-outlines-roadmap-continued-renewable-energy-progress-public-lands#:~:text=WASHINGTON%E2%80%94As%20part%20of%20its,on%20public%20lands%20by%202025.>

But more must be done when it comes to fossil fuel leasing and drilling. Rather than move forward with up to 11 new lease sales, as the proposed program includes, we strongly urge the Biden administration to adopt a final five-year program with no lease sales off our coasts. New offshore oil and gas leasing will make the challenging but essential task our nation faces of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to limit warming to below 1.5 degrees Celsius incredibly difficult, if not outright impossible. Offshore lease sales have long-term consequences by locking in production for decades and resulting in hundreds of millions of metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions. **The most recent IPCC report is clear: what we do—or fail to do—with such far-reaching decisions could determine whether we face a livable or catastrophic climate in the decades ahead.** We should not continue offering additional offshore oil and gas lease sales that will generate enormous amounts of carbon pollution when human health and economic well-being depend on reducing our emissions.

The U.S. does not need new offshore leasing in the next five-year plan to meet our national energy needs because of the substantial reserves under existing leases. According to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), oil and gas companies are sitting on nearly 2,000 active offshore leases covering 10.6 million acres of federal waters, but 73 percent of these leases—covering close to 8 million acres—are not producing oil or gas.⁴ If companies do not want to increase offshore oil drilling and production, a lack of available leases is not the problem. And even if additional offshore lease sales are held, they will not result in any new oil or gas production for at least a decade, an inconvenient truth the fossil fuel industry does not like to admit. Furthermore, new offshore leasing is unnecessary because the technologies and policies we need to transition our economy to clean energy exist today, demonstrated in part by BOEM's successful offshore wind sale in the New York Bight that raised more than \$4 billion.⁵

Despite the tremendous advances in clean-energy technology and deployment under the Biden administration, we are keenly aware of how Vladimir Putin's deadly and sadistic military attack on Ukraine has affected global energy markets and gas prices in the United States. However, Russia's horrific invasion of Ukraine makes it more urgent than ever that we break the fossil fuel chokehold on our economy, society, and national security. That means rapidly increasing domestic carbon-free energy generation and energy efficiency measures and reducing, not expanding, the public lands and waters exposed to the risk of oil and gas drilling. The last thing we need is massive new lease sales that lock future generations into decades more dependence on the fuels that hold us hostage to global price shocks, pad the war chests of despots like Vladimir Putin, and exacerbate the climate crisis.

This past January, expert witnesses testified at a House Natural Resource Committee hearing that reducing offshore fossil fuel leasing significantly reduces total global greenhouse gas emissions and will help the U.S. achieve its ambitious climate targets.⁶ If the Biden administration truly wants a whole-of-government approach to combatting the climate crisis,

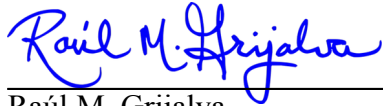
⁴ "Combined Leasing Report as of April 1, 2022." *U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management*. <https://www.boem.gov/oil-gas-energy/leasing/combined-leasing-status-report>

⁵ "Biden-Harris Administration Sets Offshore Energy Records with \$4.37 Billion in Winning Bids for Wind Sale." *U.S. Department of the Interior*. February 25, 2022. <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/biden-harris-administration-sets-offshore-energy-records-437-billion-winning-bids-wind>

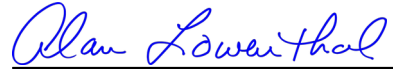
⁶ "What More Gulf of Mexico Oil and Gas Leasing Means for Achieving U.S. Climate Targets." *House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources*. January 20, 2022. https://naturalresources.house.gov/hearings/remote-emr-oversight-hearing_january-20-2022

offshore oil and gas lease sales in the final five-year program cannot be a part of that plan. Once again, we thank you for your commitment to addressing the climate crisis and protecting America's public lands and waters. We stand ready to support you and President Biden in these efforts.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural
Resources



Alan Lowenthal
Chair
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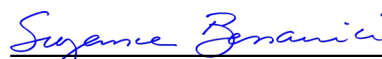
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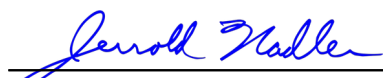
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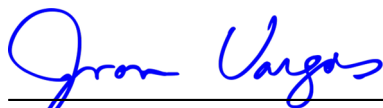
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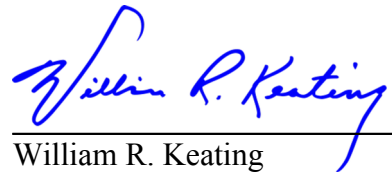
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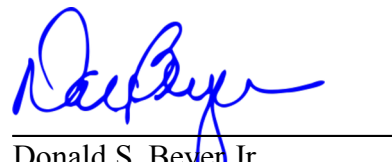
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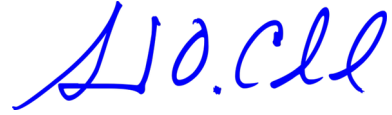
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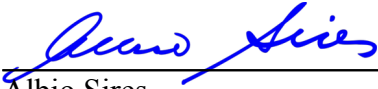
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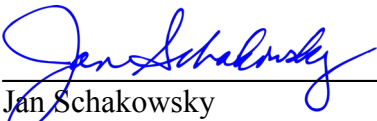
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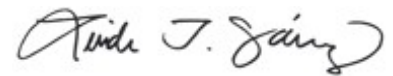
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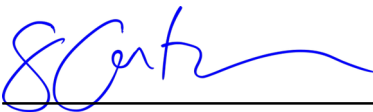
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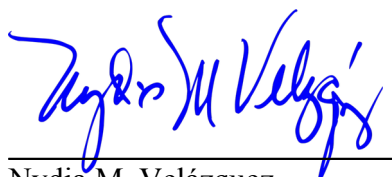
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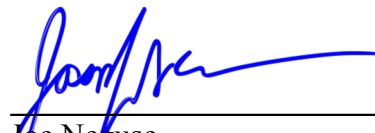
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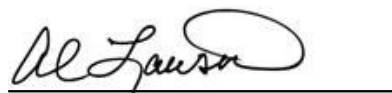
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