Crestview
AREA CHAMBER
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BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT
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DECEMBER 1, 2025

SUBJECT: Urgent Support Needed for the Eastern Gulf Test and Training Range

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Crestview Area Chamber of Commerce, representing the business community and military families throughout north Okaloosa County, we are respectfully asking for your support in keeping the Eastern Gulf Test and Training Range protected from any oil drilling or energy exploration activity.

The Department of the Interior recently announced a new offshore leasing effort that would expand potential drilling areas. This creates renewed concern that the Eastern Gulf could be included in future planning. Even the possibility of leasing in this area creates uncertainty for the military missions that rely on an open and unobstructed range.

The Eastern Gulf Test and Training Range is the largest military range in the continental United States. It provides the combination of airspace, water space, and infrastructure needed for advanced weapons development and complex training that cannot be replicated anywhere else in the country. The Department of Defense has stated many times that this range is a strategic national asset and that no other environment offers the same capabilities.

Oil and gas activity is not compatible with these missions. Drilling platforms, support vessels, and safety zones would interrupt essential training corridors and reduce the flexibility that pilots, test teams, and maritime units depend on. Offshore operations also raise security concerns. Many platforms involve foreign ownership and foreign workers, creating potential risks involving surveillance and data gathering. Introducing this activity inside or near a sensitive test range would weaken the secure environment required for weapons development and testing.

The economic strength of Northwest Florida is directly tied to the success of the military. Eglin Air Force Base contributes more than nine billion dollars to our region every year and supports more than 78,000 jobs. The long term stability of our local economy depends on protecting the missions that drive this impact. Any disruption to the test range would have real consequences for both national security and economic strength in our region.

Our community has had to respond to these proposals many times over the years. Each new effort to open the Eastern Gulf takes time and resources away from the work of supporting the warfighter. Protecting this range once and for all would allow military leaders and communities to stay focused on mission growth rather than defending the same ground year after year.

For these reasons, we respectfully request your strong support for keeping the Eastern Gulf Test and Training Range excluded from the new leasing program and for securing lasting protections that reflect its importance to national defense.

Thank you for your leadership and for your continued support of our military and our nation.

John Feeney
Chairman of the Board, 2025-2026
Crestview Area Chamber of Commerce

Neko Stubblefield
Military Affairs Committee Chair
Crestview Area Chamber of Commerce