



United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

May 31, 2018

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

Dear Secretary Zinke:

Drilling for oil and gas off of Florida's coasts poses a serious threat to our state's environment and multi-billion dollar tourism-driven economy. That's why the fight to keep oil rigs away from Florida's beaches has often united Florida's lawmakers and is one of the few issues that members of both political parties can agree on.

Given how important this issue is to the future of our state, recent comments made by a spokesman for Gov. Rick Scott have raised even more concerns about what you meant when you said Florida would be "off the table" for new drilling in the new five-year drilling plan that your agency is currently considering.

On January 8, the Department of the Interior submitted a new five-year drilling plan that would open up nearly all federal waters to offshore oil drilling, including off the coast of Florida. And one day later, before the people of Florida had a chance to comment on this new proposal, you and Gov. Scott stood in a Tallahassee airport and told the people of Florida not to worry – that despite the plan your agency had just unveiled, Florida would be "off the table" from any new drilling.

Records later obtained by POLITICO confirmed what many of us immediately thought at the time – the announcement you and Gov. Scott made that day was not the sudden change of heart it was billed to be, but instead a carefully choreographed political stunt.

What we still don't know, however, is what you and Gov. Scott actually discussed that day – and what you meant by "off the table." Would you consider a plan that prohibits oil drilling within 50 miles of Florida's coast as keeping Florida "off the table?" What about 100 miles? Or 125 miles?

Despite your initial announcement in January that Floridians should not worry about your new plan, you later told Congressional committees that "Florida did not get an exemption" and is "still under consideration."

Meanwhile, Gov. Scott – who stood by your side as you told the people of Florida not to worry about the administration’s new plan – has himself refused to say publically whether he supports extending the current moratorium and, in fact, just last week his spokesman said he “supports the 125-mile barrier.”

A 125-mile barrier does not fully protect Florida and our military – and if such a plan was put into law, it would allow oil rigs to drill 110 miles closer to Tampa Bay than currently allowed under the moratorium that Sen. Mel Martinez and I got passed into law in 2006. That’s unacceptable. In fact, any plan that allows oil drilling one inch closer to Florida’s shores is unacceptable.

These recent statements by you and Gov. Scott continue to suggest that a deal to maintain the current moratorium never existed. And if such a deal never existed, then Florida is not “off the table” and the people of Florida have been deceived. So I, once again, urge you to clarify what you meant by Florida is “off the table” and provide specific details of how your department plans to protect Florida’s coast.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.