

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2008

Director Randall B. Luthi
Minerals Management Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Luthi:

We are writing to request that the Minerals Management Service (MMS) reconsider its decision to begin a 45-day public comment period that could lead to oil and gas leasing off the coast of Virginia.

We recognize that the Bush administration has long supported energy exploration in this area, but we do not believe that this administration should begin a process that it simply cannot complete before President-elect Obama takes the oath of office in less than 70 days. Therefore, we would hope you would consider discontinuing all activities relating to the Mid-Atlantic Planning Area portion of the Five-Year Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program so that the new administration can determine how it wants to deal with this issue as part of a comprehensive energy plan moving forward.

Since MMS announced its Five-Year Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program last year, serious environmental and national security concerns have been raised about offshore drilling in the Mid-Atlantic Planning Area.

The Department of Defense has expressed "considerable concern" about opening the Mid-Atlantic Planning area off the coast of Virginia to offshore drilling. As you know, the proposed area lies within the Virginia Capes (VACAPES) Operation Area where significant Naval training and testing occurs. According to the Pentagon, oil or gas exploration in this area would restrict the military's ability to test specific weapons and would push the military further off coast, increasing the risk to flight crews.


We are also concerned that MMS has not taken into account the possible effects drilling could have on the fragile ecosystems and vital economies of coastal states. Tourism is an incredibly valuable economic engine for many coastal states, and much of that industry is dependent on clean beaches and oceans. The MMS' plan is troubling because it prepares for an activity which puts that economic engine at risk.


It is especially disappointing given that MMS itself estimates that the amount of technically recoverable oil and natural gas in the entire Mid-Atlantic Planning Area would only produce enough for one month of domestic use. To put our beaches, our fishing and our tourism economy at risk for such minimal resources is shortsighted.

Due to these concerns and the fact that a new administration will be taking office on January 20th, we believe that this administration should not continue to move forward on the Mid-Atlantic portion of the Five-Year Leasing Program. We do not believe that MMS should begin a process that it cannot finish, and therefore MMS should not proceed with this plan.

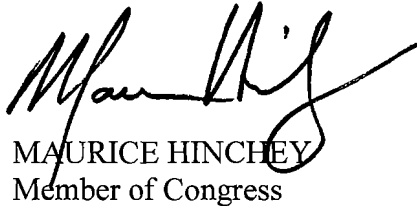
Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

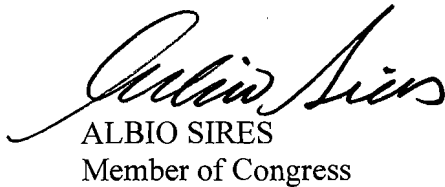

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