

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

August 14, 2012

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

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We write to comment on the Department of Interior's (DOI) final proposed 2012-2017 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

First, we are very pleased that the final proposed program does not allow oil and gas development in the Atlantic, Pacific or North Aleutian Basin. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) stated that it did not include these regions based on local recommendations and lack of infrastructure and oil spill preparedness, and we agree with that assessment.

We believe the considerations that were operative in BOEM's decisions about leasing in the Atlantic, Pacific, and North Aleutian Basin are even more relevant and significant for the Arctic Ocean. Consequently, we disagree with the Bureau's decision to permit lease sales in the Arctic in the final proposed program. The Arctic Ocean is characterized by hurricane-force storms, 20-foot swells, sea ice up to 25 feet thick, sub-zero temperatures and months-long darkness. What's more, the Arctic has extremely limited infrastructure (there are no roads or deep water ports and only a handful of small airports), and the nearest Coast Guard station is 1,000 miles away.

Government and non-governmental entities have emphasized these concerns. In April, the President's National Oil Spill Commission issued a report card on the progress that has been made to implement its 2011 recommendations and concluded, "Although there has been some progress in implementing the Commission's recommendations concerning frontier areas, we feel strongly that additional work must be done to understand the ecosystems of the Arctic and to establish the infrastructure necessary to protect this vulnerable and valuable region." In addition, last summer the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) released a report on the Arctic which concluded that major gaps in scientific understanding of the Arctic region make it "difficult, if not impossible" to make informed decisions about oil and gas development in America's Arctic Ocean.

In the final plan BOEM states a commitment to finding ways of mitigating and eliminating environmental and subsistence conflict. The delay of the Arctic leases, the inclusion of new

deferral and study areas, and your pledge to change the way lease sale areas are defined – from the broad-based “area-wide” approach to a more targeted method – are intended to allow further gathering and analysis of science and information regarding existing priority conflict areas. These are steps in the right direction. However, the Arctic is a unique environment with significant hurdles to safe exploration and drilling. We fear that including Arctic lease sales in the plan creates momentum favoring leasing regardless of whether we can ensure adequate protections for the area. While difficult, making the right decisions now is imperative for sound long-term planning in the Arctic regarding to shipping, infrastructure and ecological protections.

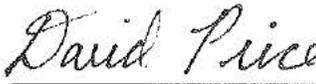
As the Department begins the process of gathering the needed data that will determine whether Arctic lease sales ultimately move forward, we urge you to specify a clear and robust process to ensure public participation and significant input from the communities most affected. In addition, we urge the Department to:

- Expand existing deferrals, include additional deferrals for areas known to be important for subsistence or ecological reasons – such as Hanna Shoal and Barrow Canyon – and incorporate other restrictions on oil and gas activities to protect biological resources;
- Make lease sales contingent upon the development, implementation, and use of a comprehensive, integrated scientific research and monitoring program;
- Condition lease sales on the demonstration of effective oil spill response capability and preparedness.

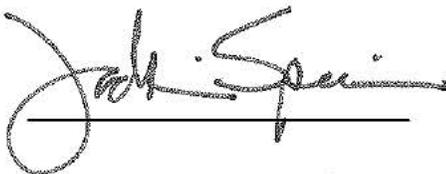
Again, we thank BOEM for excluding areas off the Pacific Coast, the Atlantic and the North Aleutian Basin for leasing in the final proposed 2012-2017 program. We urge that no lease sales go forward in the Arctic Ocean until the Department can demonstrate that exploration and drilling will not harm either the Arctic ecosystem or opportunities for subsistence.

Sincerely,


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Member of Congress


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