

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 25, 2019

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

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

Notwithstanding recent news,<sup>1</sup> we write to reaffirm our strong opposition to the inclusion of the Commonwealth of Virginia's offshore area in any forthcoming National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Offshore drilling accidents can have calamitous impacts for coastal communities. As the 2010 Deepwater Horizon tragedy illustrated, offshore drilling accidents can decimate coastal economies and valuable ecosystems. According to a recent report, BP projects that the total costs for the Deepwater Horizon disaster will reach \$65 billion, and those types of costs, and lasting damages, are simply too great of a risk for the Commonwealth.<sup>2</sup>

The Commonwealth has over 3,300 miles of coastline which support a diverse and robust economy.<sup>3</sup> Coastal tourism, recreation, and commercial fishing provide more than 86,000 jobs and nearly \$4.8 billion in gross domestic product for the Commonwealth.<sup>4</sup> Virginia's economy is further bolstered by a strong military presence in Hampton Roads, home to the world's largest naval base, and global commerce generated from the Port of Virginia, which helps support nearly ten percent of the state's resident workforce.<sup>5</sup> A potential oil spill would devastate these important sectors of the Commonwealth's economy, destroying coastal communities and the valuable ecosystems along the Atlantic coast and within the Chesapeake Bay. Virginia's shores, and the jobs and ecosystems they support, must be protected.

Residents of the Commonwealth understand the incredible risks associated with offshore drilling. That is why more than 20 communities have officially voiced their opposition to offshore drilling, including Accomack County, Northampton County, and Virginia Beach – communities that encompass the entirety of the Commonwealth's Atlantic coast.<sup>6</sup> Voices from the private sector have also expressed concerns with the potential harmful consequences of offshore drilling, including the Virginia Restaurant, Lodging, and Travel Association,<sup>7</sup> the Virginia Beach Hotel Association,<sup>8</sup> the Virginia Beach Restaurant Association,<sup>9</sup> and countless other businesses in the Tidewater region.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trumps-offshore-oil-drilling-plan-sidelined-indefinitely-11556208950>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bp-deepwaterhorizon/bp-deepwater-horizon-costs-balloon-to-65-billion-idUSKBN1F50NL>

<sup>3</sup> <https://usa.oceana.org/sites/default/files/4046/virginia.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.portofvirginia.com/about/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://usa.oceana.org/climate-and-energy/grassroots-opposition-offshore-drilling-and-exploration-atlantic-ocean-and>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.vrlta.org/page/LegislativePositions>

<sup>8</sup> <http://protectingtheatlanticcoast.org/business-organizations/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://pilotonline.com/news/local/environment/article\\_f5995758-266b-5745-b205-e5c227cd09e5.html](https://pilotonline.com/news/local/environment/article_f5995758-266b-5745-b205-e5c227cd09e5.html)

<sup>10</sup> [http://usa.oceana.org/sites/default/files/662/surfrider\\_business\\_signatories\\_feb\\_3\\_2016-2.pdf](http://usa.oceana.org/sites/default/files/662/surfrider_business_signatories_feb_3_2016-2.pdf)

Expanding offshore drilling along Virginia's coasts also represents a miscalculation about future economic growth. At current national consumption rates for oil and gas, Virginia's economically recoverable offshore resources would only meet demand for a month.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, offshore wind power has the potential to generate lasting economic benefits for Virginia, producing more power and potentially 1.5 times as many jobs as offshore drilling.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, investing in clean renewable energies instead of fossil fuels also helps us minimize the damaging effects of climate change, which are already causing dangerous sea level rise and flooding for Virginia's coastal communities.<sup>13</sup>

Our constituents are concerned with the administration's actions to open the Commonwealth's offshore area to oil and gas exploration and drilling. Again, we request that Virginia's offshore area be excluded from any forthcoming Department of the Interior National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

We look forward to your response.

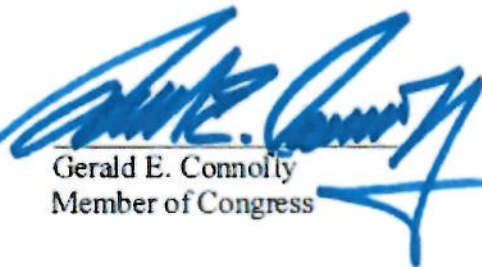
Sincerely,



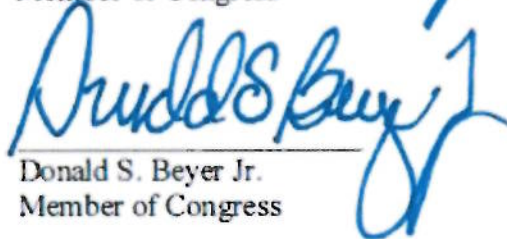
A. Donald McEachin  
Member of Congress



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott  
Member of Congress



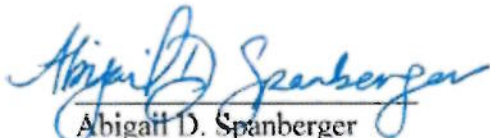
Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress




Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



Elaine G. Luria  
Member of Congress



Abigail D. Spanberger  
Member of Congress



Jennifer Wexton  
Member of Congress

<sup>11</sup> <https://usa.oceana.org/sites/default/files/4046/virginia.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> [https://oceana.org/sites/default/files/va\\_offshoreenergy\\_op.pdf](https://oceana.org/sites/default/files/va_offshoreenergy_op.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/in-norfolk-evidence-of-climate-change-is-in-the-streets-at-high-tide/2014/05/31/fe3ae860-e71f-11e3-8f90-73e071f3d637\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.51d4a82a1b57](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/in-norfolk-evidence-of-climate-change-is-in-the-streets-at-high-tide/2014/05/31/fe3ae860-e71f-11e3-8f90-73e071f3d637_story.html?utm_term=.51d4a82a1b57)