

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Alan Lowenthal
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources Oversight Hearing on

Deficiencies in the Permitting Process for Offshore Seismic Research

January 19, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

The Interior Department's just-released plan to open every region of the Outer Continental Shelf to oil and gas development is the latest example of Republicans governing for the benefit of corporations, not citizens.

Under the plan, the risks from offshore drilling would extend from coast to coast – from the shores of Maine down to the Florida Everglades, and from California's beaches to fishing and native communities in Washington State and Alaska.

In total, Secretary Zinke wants to satisfy Big Oil's insatiable appetite with over 1.6 billion acres of America's oceans, all while rolling back the safety protections developed in response to the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* disaster.

But I have news for the Secretary: Americans have zero interest in handing more of our oceans over to oil and gas corporations.

Our coastlines are home to over 123 million citizens, and along with the oceans, these resources serve as a massive economic engine.

In my home state of California, coastal counties account for 68 percent of the state's population and over 80 percent of our GDP.

But now, for the first time since 1984, the Interior Department has proposed new federal oil and gas lease sales off California's coast.

Had the Secretary consulted California residents and elected officials before his decision, he would have learned why federal offshore leases haven't been offered in over 30 years, and why our Legislature prohibited leasing in state waters in 1994.

But since he didn't, I'll enlighten him.

In 1969, a well blow-out six miles off the coast of Santa Barbara resulted in over 3 million gallons of oil gushing into the ocean.

The spill created a 35-mile long oil slick along California's coast and killed thousands of fish, birds, and marine mammals.

To-date, it's the largest oil spill in the State's history and third largest in our nation's.

A silver lining of the Santa Barbara spill is that it woke the environmental conscientiousness of many Americans and was integral to the development of today's regulatory framework that governs our natural resources.

In 1970, the National Environmental Policy Act was signed into law, the Environmental Protection Agency was created, and "Earth Day" was established.

A bipartisan California legislature banned offshore drilling in state waters in 1994, and between 1981 and 2008, the U.S. Congress prevented federal leasing off the Pacific and Atlantic coasts.

Today, Americans who live along our shores understand their critical importance and want the government to protect these resources – not risk them for another drop or two of fossil fuels.

But Secretary Zinke couldn't care less about California's history, or the about the local voices vehemently opposed to his drill-everywhere plan.

A few days after releasing his proposal, Secretary Zinke tweeted out that he met with Florida Governor Rick Scott, and after just a few minutes decided that the offshore leasing plan would no longer include Florida.

Sadly, I've had trouble deciding what's more flagrantly inappropriate.

That Governor Scott is likely running for Senate against an incumbent Democrat.

That President Trump owns a coastal resort in Palm Beach, Florida, and profits from its success.

Or that the Secretary's Twitter announcement circumvents the process, and disregards the local voices opposed to offshore drilling in every other coastal state.

Secretary Zinke's reasoning that, quote, "Florida is unique and its coasts are heavily reliant on tourism as an economic driver," reveals his tweet is nothing more than a political ploy.

I'm confident my coastal colleagues and I could easily point to the uniqueness of our coasts and the local businesses economically-reliant upon a healthy and oil-free environment.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to enter two letters into the record.

The first is a letter from the 36 Members of the California congressional delegation to Secretary Zinke opposing our State's inclusion in the leasing plan.

The second is from 151 Members of the House opposing the inclusion of the Atlantic, Arctic, Pacific and Eastern Gulf regions in the leasing plan.

Californians have experienced catastrophic oil spills before, and we'll do everything in our power to prevent them from happening again.

I thank the witnesses again for being here, and I yield back.