

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

March 29, 2018

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop:

On January 24 of this year, we wrote to you requesting a full committee oversight hearing on the development of the 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program. At the time, there were conflicting statements between Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke and the Acting Director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), Walter Cruickshank, regarding whether or not the waters offshore Florida were being considered for leasing in the 2019-2024 Program. Secretary Zinke had tweeted on January 9th that he was, “removing #Florida from the draft offshore plan,” yet at an Energy and Mineral Resources (EMR) Subcommittee hearing on January 19, Acting Director Cruickshank indicated that Florida was still under consideration, stating that, “we will be including [Florida] in the analysis for the decisions that will come out later this year.”

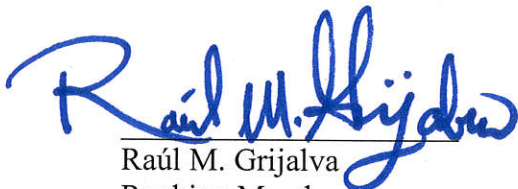
Since then, the situation has gotten less clear. On March 13, Secretary Zinke told the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee that, “Florida is still in the process,” and two days later at our hearing he said, “Florida did not get an exemption,” and, “had I left Florida off, it would have been arbitrary and capricious.” But he appeared to contradict himself at our hearing as well, saying, “I committed to no new oil and gas platforms off the coast of Florida.” There has been no further information from the Secretary clarifying his inconsistent statements, such as which coasts of Florida he may be referring to, how far “off the coast” he means, and whether his phrasing of “no new oil and gas platforms” leaves open the possibility of leasing, drill rigs, and subsea production equipment in those waters.

Meanwhile, an article in *Politico* on March 27 indicates that Florida Governor Rick Scott’s office was in close contact with high-ranking political officials at the Department of the Interior in the months leading up to the January 9th meeting in the Tallahassee airport between the Governor and the Secretary that precipitated Secretary Zinke’s tweet about removing Florida from the offshore leasing program. The available information strongly suggests that the meeting and decision to remove Florida was driven by political considerations related to the Governor’s

potential race for U.S. Senator, and that the development of the Draft Proposed 2019-2024 Program may have indeed been arbitrary and capricious despite Secretary Zinke's claims.

It is clear that we do not know the entire story about how first draft of the 5-year program was put together, nor what led to the meeting between the Governor and the Secretary at the Tallahassee airport. After the January 19 EMR subcommittee hearing, the Committee submitted a request to Acting Director Cruickshank for documents related to Florida inclusion, and subsequent exclusion-by-tweet, from the 5-year program. The deadline for a response was February 5th, yet no documents have been provided. With the tremendous implications that a new 5-year program will have for the coasts of states on the both the East and West Coasts, as well as Alaska, this is a matter that demands urgent Natural Resources Committee oversight. We reiterate our request for a full committee hearing on this matter, and also ask that you consider subpoenaing relevant documents from the Interior Department if they are not provided by the time Congress returns to session in April.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Committee on
Natural Resources



Alan Lowenthal
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on
Energy & Mineral Resources



A. Donald McEachin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on
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