

House Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee
Offshore Oil Drilling Forum
October 14, 2020

Drafted Testimony for Robin Miller, CEO, Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber of Commerce, St. Pete Beach, FL

Good morning, Chairman Lowenthal and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Robin Miller and I serve as President and CEO of the Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber of Commerce. I'm also Chair of the Florida Gulf Coast Business Coalition (FGCBC), a coalition of over 6,000 businesses committed to protecting Florida's Gulf Coast from the devastation of oil and gas exploration and drilling.

Offshore drilling is inconsistent with a thriving coastal economy in Florida. Drilling proposals are unacceptable today, tomorrow, and will still be in ten years. That is why I greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee today. Representing these Gulf Coast businesses, I voice urgent and firm support for the bipartisan bills already passed by this House of Representatives: H.R. 1941, the "Coastal and Marine Economies Protection Act," sponsored by Representative Cunningham and H.R. 205, the "Protecting and Securing Florida's Coastline Act," sponsored by Representative Rooney.

My testimony today will highlight the importance of clean coasts to a healthy economy, the consequences of offshore drilling for businesses and coastal communities across the country, and the overwhelming bipartisan opposition to expanded offshore oil and gas drilling.

These days there is very little that unites Floridians across the political spectrum, but our love for this state's beaches runs through us all. Our beaches are more than prized natural attractions, they are the lifeblood of our economy. When business is booming and our oceans are healthy, Florida coasts support nearly 610,000 jobs and generate roughly \$37.4 billion in GDP. Across America, a thriving Pacific, Atlantic and eastern Gulf of Mexico support over 2.6 million jobs and provide roughly \$180 billion in GDP¹. This is generated by tourism, recreation and fishing – long-standing industries that continue to make our coastal communities vibrant and prosperous today. Properly managed fisheries and well protected beaches can continue to drive economic activity for years to come. The same cannot be said about the finite resources found miles below our waters.

Today, a global pandemic is fueling a nationwide economic catastrophe that is hitting recreation and tourism disproportionately hard. Unfortunately, this type of economic turmoil is not a new experience for many Gulf Coast businesses.

¹ Oceana (2018) Clean Coast Economy. In: Oceana USA. Available: <https://usa.oceana.org/publications/reports/clean-coast-economy>. Accessed Feb 25, 2019

In 2010, the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster devastated the Gulf of Mexico's natural beauty, but also the region's economic prosperity. Though the oil well burst off Louisiana's coast, oil slicks do not respect state boundaries—and the whole region felt the consequences. Oil washed up on our beaches, along with those of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. All told, at least 1,300 miles of Gulf shoreline were oiled².

The 2010 disaster caused more than 10 million lost days of beach, fishing, and boating activity. Many leisure travelers stayed away from Florida's Gulf Coast in the months following the spill, even in areas that did not have oil on their beaches.³ This translated to a loss in the recreation industry of more than \$500 million.⁴ The BP disaster reduced total sales in the seafood industry by as much as \$950 million⁵ These are not distant memories for those of us on the Gulf Coast. We all remember the fear we felt as the oil slick spread and the dread that filled us the day it finally reached our shores. We remember the tarred beaches and empty restaurants. We remember worrying if we were going to be able to keep the lights on through another season. The risk of another catastrophe like the BP *Deepwater Horizon* oil disaster is too great to endanger Florida's healthy ocean resources and thriving coastal economies. The oil and gas industry has failed time and again to protect us from their dangerous practices, and the time to prioritize our communities is now.

The unequivocal risks that come with drilling are a uniting force. Last year, Florida voters overwhelmingly passed Amendment 9, which banned offshore drilling in state-controlled waters. But as we learned all too well, protecting just state waters, which are three to nine nautical miles offshore, is not enough to protect our homes and economies from a devastating spill. Across the political spectrum, voters, businesses, military leaders and elected officials oppose these dirty and dangerous practices. Current opposition includes:

- Over 380 East and West Coast municipalities.
- More than 2,300 local, state and federal elected officials.
- All the governors along the East and West Coasts — Republicans and Democrats alike.
- Alliances representing over 56,000 businesses and 500,000 fishing families.
- The New England, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic and Pacific fishery management councils

² NOAA (2017) Sea Grant Where did the oil go? A Deepwater Horizon fact sheet

³ NOAA (2016) Deepwater Horizon oil spill: Final Programmatic Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan and Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. Chapter 4 – Injury to Natural Resources.

⁴ NOAA Assessing the Impacts from Deepwater Horizon. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration | US Department of Commerce. Available: [https:// response.restoration.noaa.gov/about/media/assessing-impacts-deepwater-horizon.html](https://response.restoration.noaa.gov/about/media/assessing-impacts-deepwater-horizon.html). Accessed Apr 10, 2019.

⁵ BOEM (2016) Carroll, Michael; Gentner, Brad; Larkin, Sherry; Quigley, Kate; Perlot, Nicole, et al. An Analysis of the Impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on the Gulf of Mexico Seafood Industry. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, New Orleans, LA. OCS Study BOEM 2016-020.

- Commercial and recreational fishing interests such as the Southeastern Fisheries Association, Fisheries Survival Fund, Southern Shrimp Alliance, The Billfish Foundation and the International Game Fish Association

President Trump’s recent Presidential Memorandum, extending and expanding the moratorium on offshore drilling finally acknowledges that drilling is dirty, dangerous and unpopular. While I am thrilled that the president has finally acknowledged the severity of this issue, he did not go far enough.

We fear a presidential memorandum could be easily revoked as it is enacted. The president even stated:

“So I’m extending the moratorium to North Carolina and Virginia. Okay? And if you want to have oil rigs out there, just let me know. We’ll take it off. I mean, you know I can understand that, too.... [If] you don’t like it, you’re going to let me know, I’m going to change it. I can change things very easily.”⁶

These protections are a step in the right direction, but the threat offshore drilling poses to our communities is too great to leave to the whims of any one president. That is why we are relying on Congress to enact permanent protections for all our waters that will protect our businesses and communities for generations to come.

On behalf of FGCB members, I thank the bipartisan Members of Congress who are working to protect our oceans and coasts from expanded offshore drilling. We’re thrilled that protections were included in the House’s FY21 Interior Appropriations bill and I applaud the House passage of H.R. 1941, the “Coastal and Marine Economies Protection Act,” and H.R. 205, the “Protecting and Securing Florida’s Coastline Act.” I urge this Congress to ensure these bills are enacted so our communities can enjoy permanent protections from offshore oil drilling. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

⁶ President Donald Trump Delivers Remarks at Political Rally in Newport News, Va. Political Transcripts by CQ Transcriptions. The Wall Street Journal https://www.wsj.com/talk2020/transcript/CHTS000020200928eg9p00005?hl=CHTS000020200928eg9p00005_O3-SP5990_EP6422; C-SPAN video (1:09:52-1:10:49) <https://www.c-span.org/video/?476122-1/president-trump-rally-newport-news-virginia>