

**House Natural Resources Committee**  
**Democratic Issues Forum on Oil and Gas Activities During the Shutdown**  
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**Written Remarks by Franz A. Matzner**  
**Director of Federal Affairs, Center for Policy Advocacy**  
**Natural Resources Defense Council**

Let me begin by thanking the House Natural Resource Committee Representatives and staff for the opportunity to participate in today's forum. As my colleagues have eloquently articulated, the Trump Administration is busy bending over backwards doing the bidding of the oil and gas industry, all while the nation struggles in the face of the longest government shutdown in modern history.

Today, I will focus my remarks on the Department of Interior's decision to dedicate scarce resources to expanding offshore drilling, putting our coastal communities, ocean health, and climate at grave risk.

Let's review the facts. In the midst of a manufactured border crisis that is costing the U.S. economy \$1.2 billion each week, has left 800,000 federal workers furloughed, put a halt to essential services like food inspection, exposed our National Parks to vandalism, and forced federal scientists to apply for unemployment, the Administration is barreling ahead with its agenda to bring the hazards and harms of offshore drilling to every U.S. coastline.

Specifically, at least 40 Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) employees are being deployed to prepare Trump's proposed final 5-year offshore drilling program, process offshore seismic exploration permits, and prepare upcoming lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico. Notably, no directive has been given to pursue other activities such as developing offshore wind, and it remains unclear whether the Department is staffing basic safety oversight for ongoing oil production.

There is simply no justification for this race to lease. It may be the most audacious example yet of the Trump Administration making the oil industry's wish list priority number one. It underscores a callous disregard of the facts—of what the American people want—and of how drilling would harm communities across the country.

And it rests on a paper-thin, hypothetical argument that even the slightest delay in drilling carries economic consequences—a claim made while the impact of shuttered government agencies on federal employees and their families is all too real.

There are five primary reasons Trump's "drill at all costs" mantra doesn't hold water.

**First, There is No Urgency.**

The federal government is already operating under the 2017–2022 leasing program finalized by the previous administration after exhaustive review of current science, economics, and public input. Further, the development of the 5-year leasing program is a long process mandated by

statute and there are still several intensive steps remaining. Therefore, assigning 40 staff to work through the remainder of the shutdown, even if it unnecessarily takes another month or two to conclude, would not meaningfully affect the timeline for offshore oil and gas leasing or production. Further lease sales don't translate to immediate oil production, if they do at all. In fact, less than [30 percent](#) of America's ocean leased for offshore drilling is producing. For those that do make it to production, the long lead times and capital investment required to initiate drilling and bring oil to consumers can take a decade or longer—including up to three times as long in remote, challenging environments like the Arctic. Simply put, there is no need to dedicate scarce resources to processing oil and gas paperwork—even if it were in the public interest, which it decidedly is not.

### **Second, We Don't Need More Offshore Oil.**

There is no oil shortage. In fact, we are in the midst of an ongoing global oil supply glut that has the domestic oil industry exporting 7.7 million barrels of crude oil and refined petroleum fuels every day. That's equivalent to about one-third of our nationwide demand. In fact, at the end of last November, the U.S. became a net exporter for the first time in decades. That wasn't forecasted to happen for at least another few years. Underscoring this point, in a March sale of Gulf of Mexico leases, one the disgraced recent Interior Secretary called “a bellwether on offshore, probably [for] the next 10 years,” saw remarkably low interest from industry. That was true of the previous sale, in August 2017. A broken clock is right twice a day, and Ryan Zinke's estimation of the implication of that sale is one of the few things he nailed.

### **Third, We Must Transition to Clean Energy, not Lock-in More Carbon Pollution.**

Expanding offshore drilling directly contradicts the global consensus that we must move as rapidly as possible from fossil fuels to clean energy. Increased offshore drilling would exacerbate the worst effects of climate change, including increasing the likelihood of wildfire and drought, severe weather events, amplifying health risks, and stressing agriculture. If we're to keep climate change below 1.5° C, [we need](#) to accelerate the clean energy economy, not invest in more offshore drilling that would lock in offshore production for decades, pumping carbon pollution into the air while impeding the rapid advances we need to protect this and future generations.

### **Fourth, Offshore Drilling Poses Economic and Ecologic Harm**

Drilling in coastal waters would put millions of jobs at risk and threaten marine ecosystems from oil spills that are both frequent and disastrous. In the seven years after the BP oil spill, the industry experienced more than 4,000 explosions, fires, collisions and related incidents, including 34 oil spills of more than 2,000 gallons each. For example, modeling indicates that a single major spill in the Arctic Ocean would spread throughout the region, devastating this home to iconic wildlife. Worse, the federal government itself concluded that full development of even just one lease sale in the Arctic Ocean's Chukchi Sea would run [a 75 percent risk of a major oil spill](#). Further, the [study](#) behind this estimate concluded that the risk of a spill in other coastal waters is generally even higher. Importantly, spill incidents and [modeling consistently](#) confirms

that spills can travel widely, which means opening any region to drilling threatens entire coastlines.

Further contradicting the Administration's argument of economic harm from delayed leasing, a spill could devastate hundreds of coastal communities and tens of thousands of businesses that depend on clean beaches and healthy ocean waters. For example, fishing, tourism, and recreation along the coasts of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and eastern Gulf of Mexico support over [2.6 million jobs and \\$180 billion in gross domestic product](#). Oil spills could also harm our [cherished national parks](#), 68 of which are newly threatened by the Trump administration's proposal. Those coastal parks hosted 4 million visitors in 2017, who spent more than \$4.5 billion in local communities and supported 59,517 jobs.

Lastly, if the Administration was earnest in its desire for economic gains, it would choose offshore wind development over offshore oil. According to the recent [report](#) by E2 (Environmental Entrepreneurs), harnessing offshore wind energy would triple the number of wind energy jobs in five Atlantic Coast states, generate nearly 25,000 construction and operational jobs, and cumulatively generate \$3.6 billion in economic benefits. Workers in the five states would directly earn more than \$1.3 billion in wages during construction and, once completed, \$57 million annually during operation. Further, the analysis forecasts generation of \$265 million in federal taxes and more than \$160 million in state and local taxes, cumulatively. Once completed, tax revenue from operating the wind farms in all five states would reach nearly \$19 million annually throughout the life of the wind farms.

In contrast, the report confirms concerns regarding the economic impacts of oil spills, documenting that just a single month of beach and fishing closures due to an oil spill would cost the five states' over \$2.7 billion in GDP and \$1.3 billion in lost wages.

It's time to reject propaganda that poses a false choice between protecting our coasts and "energy." We must recognize that we live in an era of energy abundance. Clean energy is here to stay. It's in our driveways, on our roofs and powering our cities—and there's no end in sight.

### **Fifth, the Public Does Not Support Expanded Drilling.**

Since President Trump issued his executive order to open our public coasts to expanded drilling, a tidal wave of bipartisan resistance has overtaken the nation—coast to coast.

Citizens have submitted more than [1.35 million public comments](#) in opposition, legislators from both parties are rejecting expanded offshore drilling via a host of [letters](#), legislation, and [public statements](#) from more than 200 Representatives and 43 Senators. As well, the majority of coastal Governors have weighed in against drilling off their states.

In addition, 330 community and municipal [resolutions](#) have been passed against drilling and seismic testing, with more coming seemingly by the day. Faith leaders representing multiple denominations have issued [letters](#) calling on the Administration to protect God's creation, not sell it off. Opposition continues to grow from the business community, including [the Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic](#), [Environmental Entrepreneurs](#), and [Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Association](#), which collectively represent more than 35,000 business, 500,000

fishing families, and clean energy business owners and investors. And hundreds of [editorials](#) and [opinion pieces](#) from around the country have expressed support for protecting coastal [economies](#), [ecosystems](#), wildlife, and our climate, including from representatives of the [Bipartisan Oil Spill Commission](#).

Public opinion polling confirms this broad, bipartisan sentiment. [The Natural Resources Defense Council and the League of Conservation Voters released national survey findings showing broad-based, bipartisan opposition](#) to expanded offshore drilling and a huge preference – 59 percent to 36 percent -- for permanently protecting the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans from any future drilling.

## **Conclusion**

The Trump Administration's decision to proceed with offshore oil and gas activities despite the government shutdown is as unjustifiable as it is harmful.

The argument that continuing to prepare its drilling program is essential to the economy doesn't hold water, nor can it be justified by any immediate or even long-term energy supply mandate.

In contrast, expanded drilling in public waters is vehemently opposed by the public, contraindicated by current science, poses a direct threat to existing local economies, and ignores the many benefits of clean energy.

Allocating scarce resources to offshore drilling during the shutdown is yet another example of how the Trump Administration is aiding and abetting the oil and gas industry in its mission to lock-up our public lands and oceans and stands in direct contradiction to the public interest and the public will.