

Washington, D.C. – Reps. David Price (NC-04), Rush Holt (NJ-12), and Lois Capps (CA-23) led a group of 64 Members of Congress today in sending a letter to Interior Secretary Salazar thanking the administration for excluding new oil and gas development in the Atlantic or Pacific and urging caution against too quickly moving forward with additional leasing in the Arctic. The Members have joined a groundswell of voices building over recent months to protect the Arctic.

During the public comment period that ends today on the Obama administration's proposed Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas leasing program for 2012-2017, more than 250,000 people have urged President Obama to remove the two Arctic lease sales proposed in the draft plan. In addition, more than 500 distinguished U.S. and international scientists signed an open letter asking the Obama administration to follow through on its stated commitment to science in managing resource extraction in the Arctic.

The administration's proposal would open the Arctic to new oil and gas development even though there is no viable method to clean up an oil spill in the Arctic's extreme conditions and we lack basic information about the Arctic's fragile marine environment.

"Last summer, a report from the nation's leading scientists identified major gaps in scientific knowledge about the Arctic ecosystem and the impacts of drilling in the region," Rep. Price said. "There are also serious questions about our ability to respond effectively to a spill in Arctic conditions. America has already learned the pitfalls of allowing risky oil and gas drilling to proceed without the proper safeguards in place to protect the environment and ensure quick spill containment. We should listen to the scientists, and not repeat our mistakes."

"The Arctic is among the most challenging places on Earth to drill for oil – frigid, remote, dark, and underdeveloped," said Rep. Holt. "It is bizarre for oil companies to suggest that, despite their failure to contain the Deepwater Horizon spill under much kinder conditions, they are fully prepared to manage an Arctic disaster. Secretary Salazar should ensure that Arctic waters are managed as public trust, enforcing strong protections for public health and the environment."

"While I'm pleased Secretary Salazar is committed to preventing new oil and gas drilling off the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, I remain concerned with any proposal that would allow new drilling in the Arctic Ocean," added Rep. Capps. "Despite assurances from the oil industry that it's safe, and some recent steps taken by the Interior Department to improve safety and environmental

requirements, offshore drilling is a dirty and dangerous business. My constituents know firsthand that oil spills can and do happen, and how hard they are to clean up. They can tell you that if it was that hard to clean-up the spill in the relatively calm conditions off Santa Barbara, it's going to be near-impossible to respond to and contain any spill in the Arctic Ocean."

The Members' letter notes that there are significant hurdles to resource extraction in the unique Arctic environment and outlines a series of strategies that should be in place prior to including any new leasing in the region.

The text of the letter follows:

The Honorable Ken Salazar

Secretary

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street, NW

Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

On behalf of the undersigned members of Congress, we write to comment on your administration's proposed 2012-2017 Outer Continental Shelf Oil (OCS) and Gas Leasing Program. Our comments focus specifically on three geographic regions: the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Arctic Oceans. While we are pleased to see that no oil and gas development will occur in the Atlantic or Pacific, we urge caution against too quickly moving forward with additional

leasing in the Arctic, which this plan in its current form will do.

Less than two years ago, the Deepwater Horizon oil rig suffered a catastrophic blowout, killing 11 crew members and setting off the biggest environmental disaster this country has witnessed. This tragedy reminded the U.S. public that offshore drilling is a risky, dangerous business. In the months since the disaster in the Gulf, the Department of the Interior (DOI) has taken steps to decrease the chances of another catastrophic blowout, and we appreciate these efforts. As the Department accepts comments on its new five-year plan for offshore drilling, the memory of this horrific accident must not be forgotten, and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) must move forward with the utmost caution.

First, we are encouraged that BOEM did not include areas off the Pacific Coast for leasing in the draft 2012-2017 program. The agency stated it did not include the Pacific "to accommodate the recommendations of governors of coastal states and of state and local agencies." We support the agency's decision for the Pacific Coast.

We are also encouraged by BOEM's deferral of leasing in the Atlantic in the draft 2012-2017 program. In its justification, the agency cited a "lack of infrastructure to support oil and gas exploration and development, as well as spill preparedness and response." As demonstrated in 2010 with the Deepwater Horizon disaster, sufficient spill preparedness is crucial to a successful offshore drilling operation, so we support the decision to keep the Atlantic lease-free through 2017.

However, we are perplexed that the decision to withhold lease sales from the Atlantic due to a lack of infrastructure and spill preparedness was paired with the decision to hold two lease sales in the Arctic, a significantly more remote, undeveloped region. During the announcement of the proposed program, you noted the need to "proceed cautiously, safely and based on the best science available." The current draft fails to do this. The Arctic Ocean is at best a challenging climate for offshore drilling. At worst, the Arctic is a place with harsh weather conditions, sub-zero temperatures and long periods of darkness. The nearest Coast Guard station is more than 1,000 miles away from areas under consideration for leasing. Spill response capacity is simply nonexistent in these remote, icy waters. Just this summer the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), in its report on the Arctic, stated that because of major gaps in scientific understanding of the region "it is difficult, if not impossible" to make informed decisions about oil and gas development in America's Arctic Ocean. In addition, the President's own oil spill commission stated that, "the remoteness and weather of the Arctic frontier create special challenges in the event of an oil spill. Successful oil-spill response methods from the Gulf of

Mexico, or anywhere else, cannot simply be transferred to the Arctic."

The Arctic is a unique environment with significant hurdles that the DOI and related agencies must genuinely address before considering any new leasing in the region in the upcoming five-year plan. Outlined below are a series of strategies that should be in place prior to including Arctic areas in a five-year plan.

- DOI must prioritize protections for important ecological and subsistence use areas based on adequate science that ensures the Arctic Ocean and its wildlife and people are protected.
- DOI must adopt new regulations on spill response and planning standards. There have been no changes in spill response regulations since the Deepwater Horizon disaster and existing regulations are far too weak. Within those regulations there should be specific standards for operating in the Arctic. Such regulations should address issues like location of adequate capping and containment systems, immediate relief well rig capability, seasonal drilling restrictions, and full sensitive area and shoreline response strategies and equipment.
- Consistent with updated regulations, companies and federal agencies like the Coast Guard should be required to develop and have in place adequate spill response plans, methods and equipment to ensure an effective response to a potential spill.
- The USGS report on the Arctic gave over 60 recommendations to make informed leasing decisions. DOI must have a sound scientific plan for managing any future leasing in the Arctic Ocean by implementing these recommendations.
- Equipment to be used for drilling and spill containment and response needs to be tested and proven effective in Arctic conditions.

Including lease sales in the proposed 2012-2017 five year plan before these strategies are in place will put the fragile Arctic ecosystem at significant risk.

To conclude, before any new leasing activity is scheduled for the Arctic, all agencies involved in the planning process must develop adequate science to understand the implications of drilling in the Arctic Ocean, put in place a plan that guarantees protection of the Arctic Ocean and ecosystem, and guarantee that companies bidding on leases in the Arctic Ocean and applying for permits to drill wells in this unique, intact ecosystem, are fully prepared to handle a disaster like Deepwater Horizon.

Sincerely,

Members of Congress

Signers (in alphabetical order): Gary Ackerman, Howard Berman, Earl Blumenauer, Bruce Braley, Lois Capps, David Cicilline, Emanuel Cleaver, Steven Cohen, Gerry Connolly, John Conyers, Diana DeGette, Donna Edwards, Keith Ellison, Anna Eshoo, Sam Farr, Bob Filner, Barney Frank, John Garamendi, Raul Grijalva, Luis Gutierrez, Alcee Hastings, Maurice Hinchey, Mazie Hirono, Rush Holt, Mike Honda, Jesse Jackson, Jr., Bill Keating, Dale Kildee, Dennis Kucinich, Jim Langevin, Barbara Lee, John Lewis, Zoe Lofgren, Ed Markey, Doris Matsui, Betty McCollum, Jim McDermott, James McGovern, Mike Michaud, Brad Miller, George Miller, Jim Moran, Jerrold Nadler, John Olver, Frank Pallone, Bill Pascrell, Chellie Pingree, David Price, Steven Rothman, Bobby Rush, Loretta Sanchez, Jan Schakowsky, Adam Schiff, Bobby Scott, Jose Serrano, Louise Slaughter, Jackie Speier, Pete Stark, Mike Thompson, Paul Tonko, Niki Tsongas, Maxine Waters, Henry Waxman, Lynn Woolsey