

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 12, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Penny Pritzker
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Jewell and Secretary Pritzker:

The continued exploration and development of oil and natural gas in the Gulf of Mexico Outer Continental Shelf is vital to U.S. energy security, economic vitality, and quality of life. We hereby register our concerns over potential restrictions on future geological and geophysical activities, including seismic surveys, identified in the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Gulf of Mexico Geological and Geophysical Activities (DPEIS).

Seismic surveys have been conducted safely in the Gulf of Mexico for the past 50 years by the energy industry, government agencies, and academic researchers. They have taken place alongside prosperous fishing and tourism industries and within a thriving ecosystem with an abundance of marine life. This technology has allowed for the discovery of billions of barrels of oil and trillions of cubic feet of natural gas which, in turn, has produced millions of jobs, facilitated a robust regional economy, provided tens of billions of dollars annually to federal and state governments, and lowered energy costs for American consumers. The Gulf of Mexico is the backbone of U.S. oil and natural gas development and its importance cannot be overstated.

The DPEIS that BOEM published in cooperation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and other agencies identifies a range of alternative geological and geophysical activities and assesses the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives over a 10-year period. A number of the alternatives analyzed by BOEM, however, are unrealistic and include a number of overly restrictive and costly mitigation measures. If Alternatives B, C, D, E, F, or G were implemented, it would severely inhibit the timely and efficient collection of seismic survey data in the Gulf of Mexico necessary to support current and future oil and gas exploration and development. A lack of accurate information increases risk and possible environmental damage because additional activities will be necessary to identify resources and potential subsurface hazards cannot be readily identified. It is also important to note that adopting the mitigations in these unreasonable alternatives will decrease domestic supplies of energy without affecting energy demand, which would weaken our nation's energy security by increasing our reliance on foreign oil and gas sources.

As such, only Alternative A is reasonable, and BOEM's environmental analysis should accurately reflect the best available scientific research and industry's operational experience, which to date indicates that seismic surveys carried out under standard industry protocols have little-to-no impact on marine mammal and wildlife populations. It is important to reiterate BOEM's chief environmental officer Dr. William Brown has stated that "there has been no documented scientific evidence of noise from air guns used in geological and geophysical (G&G) seismic activities adversely affecting marine animal populations or coastal communities."

Alternative A is the only alternative that is based on current operational experience, including standard seismic protocols that include reasonable safeguards for marine mammals. It recognizes that seismic surveys are a proven, environmentally sound technology that has been used for decades, and we urge the agencies to select this alternative as their preferred choice. We also urge the agencies that regulate oil and gas operations to take all necessary steps to ensure effective inter-agency coordination on this DPEIS and forthcoming regulations, so that breakdowns of the regulatory process – as seen in Alaska and the Atlantic OCS arenas – are not repeated.

Continuing to conduct geophysical surveys in the Gulf of Mexico will produce known discoveries safely and more efficiently and will help uncover new sources of oil and natural gas. This data will allow the government to make informed decisions about the potential for continued job creation and economic growth from offshore energy production in the Gulf. Seismic and other geophysical surveys in the Gulf of Mexico are a critical part of the safe offshore energy development that is necessary to harness our nation's energy potential for the benefit of American energy consumers.

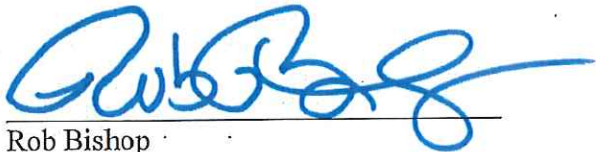
Sincerely,



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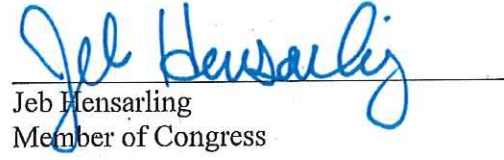

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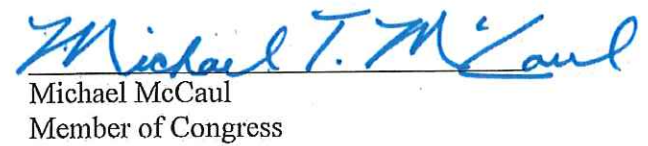

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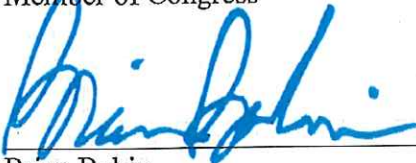

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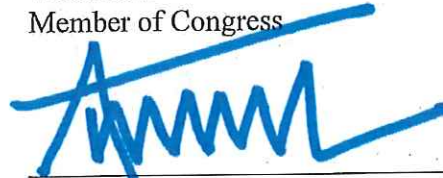
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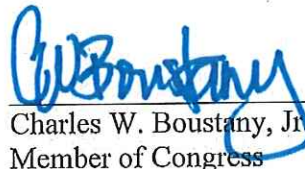
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