

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 19, 2022

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington DC 20500

Secretary Deb Haaland
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear President Biden and Secretary Haaland,

We write with grave concern over the Department of the Interior's ("Interior") expansion of federal oil and gas leasing onshore and offshore, including through the Bureau of Land Management's June onshore lease sale and the proposed five-year plan for offshore leasing from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

New fossil fuel leasing on public lands and waters is incompatible with meeting international commitments to limit global warming to 1.5° Celsius. Adjustments such as raising royalties to 18.75% or removing low-producing lands do not change this critical fact. While the oil and gas industry is cynically exploiting the crisis in Ukraine to demand even more access to our public lands, turning even more lands over for drilling will not offer relief at the pump or aid to the people of Ukraine and other countries caught in conflicts tied to fossil fuels. That's why the Congressional Progressive Caucus has included a ban on new fossil fuel leases on federal lands and waters in its Executive Action Agenda. We need real climate leadership today, and that starts with canceling the leases offered and/or sold in June and issuing a final five-year offshore leasing plan with no new leases.

Climate pollution from the world's already-producing fossil fuel developments, if fully developed, would push warming past 1.5 degrees. Avoiding the most catastrophic climate impacts requires ending new investment in fossil fuel projects, including ending all new leasing on public lands.¹ New commitments of fossil fuels are simply incompatible with our international commitments.

¹ "Net Zero by 2050." *International Energy Agency*. May 2021. <https://www.iea.org/reports/net-zero-by-2050>

We appreciate your 2019 commitment to ban new oil and gas leasing on public lands and waters² and to require any federal permitting decision to consider the effects of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change,³ followed by your announcement upon assuming office that your administration would “listen to science” and deliver environmental justice.⁴ After just eight days in office, you took strong action by directing Interior to pause new oil and gas leases on public lands and waters and to initiate a comprehensive review, “including potential climate and other impacts associated with oil and gas activities.”⁵ Most recently, in April, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki reiterated that the administration was, “committed to the ban [you] called for on the expansion of... leasing on federal lands, in part because [you want] to move toward a clean energy economy... and address climate change.”⁶

However, we have concerns that your Administration’s actions have not matched the promise to ban new oil and gas leasing and urge prompt reconsideration of these steps and similar actions going forward.

In particular, your administration held the largest ever oil and gas lease sale in the Gulf of Mexico⁷, offered over 128,000 acres of public lands lease sales in June 2022,⁸ and continued fossil fuel development in the Gulf in your proposed five-year plan, despite having no legal obligation to do so.⁹ In the case of the 2021 Gulf lease sale, not only was Interior not legally obligated to move forward with the sale,¹⁰ a federal court found that the department illegally cut corners in order to do so when it used flawed environmental analyses which ignored requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act.¹¹ In addition, many of the leases sold in Wyoming, Montana, and North Dakota in June fall under Fort Laramie treaty territory, where Indigenous people retain rights to hunt, fish, and gather. The United States has a trust responsibility and is required under law to consult with tribes, but your Administration did not do

² “9 Key Elements of Joe Biden’s Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution.” *Biden Harris Democrats*. <https://joebiden.com/9-key-elements-of-joe-bidens-plan-for-a-clean-energy-revolution/>

³ “The Biden Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution and Environmental Justice.” *Biden Harris Democrats*. <https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/>

⁴ “Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.” *The White House*. January 27, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, April 18, 2022.” *The White House*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/04/18/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-april-18-2022/>

⁷ “Biden Administration to Lease Out 80 Million Acres in Gulf of Mexico for Oil, Days After Climate Summit.” *Center for Biological Diversity*. November 16, 2021. <https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/biden-administration-to-lease-out-80-million-acres-in-gulf-of-mexico-for-oil-days-after-climate-summit-2021-11-16/>

⁸ “Interior Department Announces Significantly Reformed Onshore Oil and Gas Lease Sales.” *U.S. Department of the Interior*. April 15, 2022. <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-announces-significantly-reformed-onshore-oil-and-gas-lease-sales>

⁹ “Revealed: Biden administration was not legally bound to auction gulf drilling rights.” *The Guardian*. December 13, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/dec/13/revealed-biden-administration-was-not-legally-bound-to-auction-gulf-drilling-rights>

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ “US judge blocks sale of Gulf of Mexico drilling leases over climate concerns.” *The Guardian*. January 28, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/28/gulf-of-mexico-oil-gas-drilling-leases-judge-blocks-climate-biden>

the due diligence to ensure this occurred. Meanwhile, Interior has issued more permits to drill on public lands in one year under your administration than over the first year of the previous administration.¹² While you promised in your Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad¹³ to conduct a comprehensive review of the leasing program, after being delayed for months, the final report was quietly released and excluded the climate impacts of the leasing program from its analysis.¹⁴

Our constituents are counting on you to do everything in your power to stop ballooning oil and gas drilling, rather than adopt the same practices that caused and are worsening the climate emergency. The June onshore lease sales prioritized short-term profits for industry over science and future generations, and we urge you to nullify the leases that were offered and/or sold. Toxic air pollution from oil and gas drilling and burning is quite literally killing Americans, with poor, Black and Brown communities feeling the worst impacts. A Harvard University study found that fossil fuel air pollution is responsible for one in five deaths worldwide.¹⁵

We are appreciative of unprecedented steps the Administration has taken, including invoking the Defense Production Act to accelerate the production and deployment of renewable technologies such as solar panels, heat pumps, and fuel cells. We encourage additional decisive action to exercise bolder climate leadership, including through ordering a robust analysis of the climate impacts of fossil fuel leasing and using administrative authority to make good on your promise to stop new oil and gas leasing and permitting on public lands and waters. Despite the inclusion of new leases in the Gulf of Mexico and Cook Inlet in the proposed five-year offshore lease plan, you still have the power to stop new lease sales and protect Gulf and Alaska communities. Interior has broad authority to restrict production of fossil fuels on new and existing leases that must be utilized.

The climate science is clear and uncompromising. You and your administration have the authority and a clear pathway to address the quarter of U.S. climate emissions that come from fossil fuel extraction on public lands. We urge you to act to fulfill the visionary climate agenda of this administration by canceling the onshore leases offered and sold in June, issuing a final five-year offshore plan with no new leases, banning new fossil fuel leases on public lands and waters, and beginning the process of phasing out oil and gas production on federal land and waters.

¹² “Biden’s Oil Letdown.” *Public Citizen*. December 6, 2021. <https://www.citizen.org/article/bidens-oil-letdown/>

¹³ “Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.” *The White House*. January 27, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>

¹⁴ “Interior Dept. Report on Drilling is Mostly Silent on Climate Change.” *The New York Times*. November 26, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/26/climate/climate-change-drilling-public-lands.html>

¹⁵ “Fossil fuel air pollution responsible for 1 in 5 deaths worldwide.” *Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment*. February 9, 2021. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/c-change/news/fossil-fuel-air-pollution-responsible-for-1-in-5-deaths-worldwide/>

Sincerely,



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Members of Congress:

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