

Dear Secretary Zinke:

As Members of Congress from Virginia, we request you remove the Virginia offshore area from your proposed 2019-2024 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program. We note your willingness to listen to local voices in Florida with grave concerns over the risks of offshore drilling there. We ask that you likewise consider local opposition in Virginia's coastal communities as well as opposition from its Governor, Senators, and House members to a new five-year plan at this point.

The statement from your office announcing the removal of the Florida offshore stated, "Local voice matters." We couldn't agree more.

While many states have long histories of energy production, states like Florida and Virginia have robust economies based on other sectors like tourism, aquaculture, outdoor recreation, deepwater port commerce, and especially Department of Defense infrastructure. Florida is home to some 20 DOD installations, while Virginia's coastal area alone has more than a dozen across every service branch, including Naval Station Norfolk, the world's largest naval installation. While it is within DOD's mandate to work with Interior, any look at a map displays vast offshore areas in which drilling could conflict with military activities. In a time of relatively stable prices and booming oil and gas production elsewhere, the risks outweigh the benefits.

Opposition to offshore drilling is an opinion broadly shared by communities on the Virginia coast, including by the Democratic mayor of Norfolk and the Republican mayor of Virginia Beach. In fact, the city council of Virginia Beach (Virginia's most populous city) actively voted to shift its prior support for offshore drilling from supportive to neutral, then from neutral to opposed.

We hope you will take opposition from Virginia coastal communities as seriously as you took the concerns from Florida residents and elected officials.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,