

Add your name to the military sign-on letter using this online form:

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Deadline July 15th, 2020.

Questions? Please contact Col. Jim Heald (USAF Ret.) via email at jheald@indyneinc.com or phone at 850-420-2739.

July 16, 2020

Dear Congress,

As retired military leaders and personnel, we write to you in whole-hearted support of a measure to permanently extend the current moratorium on oil and gas leasing activities in the eastern Gulf of Mexico. We also strongly oppose any approach that would not extend the moratorium and would allow offshore drilling to encroach upon Florida's Gulf coast. We urge you to support amending the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to make the current moratorium permanent.

In 2006, Congress recognized the importance of respecting Florida's bipartisan opposition to drilling by keeping most of the eastern Gulf of Mexico and a portion of the central Gulf of Mexico free of offshore drilling activities.¹ To preserve this marine area for the benefit of both the environment and especially military operations that are critical to our nation's defense, Congress enacted a moratorium in the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act. While protections remain today, they are set to expire in June 2022. Wasting no time, the President has already proposed selling leases in this area once the moratorium expires.² Investigative reporting recently revealed that the oil industry is most interested in currently protected areas and the Administration plans to move ahead with this offshore drilling plan shortly after the November election.³

As you know, the expansive area off Florida's Gulf coast has a long history of providing unconstrained access for military training and testing activities that are essential to our national security. The largest military training range in the continental United States, the Gulf Range, provides more uninterrupted surface and airspace than all other ranges in the lower 48 combined.⁴ Its enormous size along with numerous adjacent military installations create a critical military asset that simply cannot be replicated anywhere else.⁵

According to a 2018 Department of Defense report, unrestricted offshore drilling is fundamentally at odds with military operations in the eastern Gulf of Mexico.⁶ Keeping this region free of offshore

¹ 43 USC 1331. Sec. 104. Moratorium on Oil and Gas Leasing in Certain Areas of Gulf of Mexico. Gulf of Mexico Energy Security.

² Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (2018) 2019-2024 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program

³ Politico (2020) Interior to push drilling in Florida waters after November election. Available:

<https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/10/interior-drilling-florida-waters-november-election-310595>

⁴ Florida Defense Support Task Force (2017) Oil Drilling & Military Mission Compatibility in the Gulf of Mexico. Enterprise Florida, Inc.

⁵ Florida Defense Support Task Force (2017) Oil Drilling & Military Mission Compatibility in the Gulf of Mexico. Enterprise Florida, Inc

⁶ Department of Defense (2018) Preserving Military Readiness in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico.

oil leasing and associated oil infrastructure will help guarantee that vital military readiness activities can continue securely and without interference. Simply put, failure to extend the eastern Gulf moratorium poses a threat to America's military preparedness and threatens our national defense goals.

Without the drilling moratorium and ready military access to the eastern Gulf, Florida loses the main draw for hosting its 20 military installations and the economic boost these bases generate. In 2018, defense spending in the state generated \$95 billion in total economic impacts and contributed to nearly 915,000 jobs.⁷ The ripple effect of mission loss on Florida's economy would be massive. For example, an economic assessment of Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field found that if these bases suffer just a 5 percent loss in their usual activities, it will equate to a loss of 2,400 total jobs and \$181.5 million.⁸ Unhindered access to the eastern Gulf of Mexico is crucial to maintaining the long-term prospects of this industry and the jobs it supports throughout Florida.

If we let drilling come closer to Florida's coastline, there will be devastating oil spills. These not only threaten coastal economies but also training and testing which may have to stop in the face of a large-scale spill and any cleanup activity that followed. As we know from the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon*, it took BP engineers and government contractors 87 days to cap the leaking wellhead and stop the flow of oil into the Gulf.⁹ If our troops cannot practice in conditions found throughout the Gulf Range, they will be less prepared to defend our nation in a time of need. If access to the eastern Gulf of Mexico is traded for oil and gas development, we risk our military being a less capable force and falling behind our adversaries overseas.¹⁰ It is not just a Florida issue – this affects our entire nation.

We cannot give up an inch of ground when it comes to the current moratorium. We urge Congress not to relinquish its power to influence when and where offshore drilling will occur and in doing so ensure no further oil and gas encroachment on the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

We urge you to permanently extend the current offshore drilling moratorium in the FY2021 NDAA. Including this provision is critical for continued military operations and weapons testing in the eastern Gulf of Mexico as well as for protecting the environment and economy from oil spills. We also ask you to reject measures in the bill that would permit offshore drilling to come any closer to Florida beaches and military bases. Action to protect the eastern Gulf this year through the NDAA is vital to maintaining the only military range in the continental U.S. capable of accommodating the technological requirements of our military – today and in the future. Congress must renew its commitment to protecting the Gulf Range, the environment and Florida's economy.

⁷ Enterprise Florida and Florida Defense Support Task Force (2020) Florida Defense Industry Economic Impact Analysis.

⁸ Team Eglin Economic Analysis of Mission Impact Scenarios (2019) Presented to the Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County

⁹ National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon and Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling (2011) Deep Water: The Gulf oil disaster and the future of offshore drilling.

¹⁰ Department of Defense (2018) Preserving Military Readiness in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico

Sincerely,

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