

*explore*  
**Offshore**  
FOR SOUTH CAROLINA

Acting Secretary David Bernhardt  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

February 19, 2019

Dear Acting Secretary Bernhardt:

I write you today on behalf of the Explore Offshore coalition to express our support for offshore natural gas and oil development in the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). Opening offshore federal waters to energy development presents a unique opportunity for South Carolina to boost the state economy, create new well-paying jobs, and create new revenue sources for important issues such as state infrastructure and public schools. Explore Offshore represents nearly 40 South Carolina-based businesses and community leaders, and we urge you to support the inclusion of the Atlantic OCS into the Department of Interior's 5-year offshore program for 2019-2024. Doing so would benefit South Carolina and could help create thousands of jobs across the nation, help the nation to become more energy secure and diversify coastal economies.

The Explore Offshore coalition is made up of more than 200 diverse groups and individuals from South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Virginia and several national groups. Explore Offshore's membership includes chambers of commerce, trade associations, military contractors, women and minority owned businesses, faith organizations, and more from all across our state and the country. Our coalition is dedicated to responsibly securing America's energy future, and that begins with expanding domestic natural gas and oil development, specifically in the Atlantic, which could spur \$2.2 billion in annual spending, add more than \$1.5 billion to our state and local tax revenues over the next two decades, and support nearly 34,000 jobs in South Carolina.

Careers in the natural gas and oil industry have an average salary of \$113,000 per year and often do not require a four-year degree. For the many South Carolinians who are looking for a high-paying job to support their families, this opportunity is one we hope you'll recognize as unique. Additionally, industry investments and new state tax revenues from natural gas and oil development are often used to fund critical state programs like infrastructure improvements and education and public safety programs. As the state seeks to boost its economy, we urge you to consider the benefits that offshore natural gas and oil industry could bring to South Carolina.

The year-round well-paying jobs that the industry could bring into our state would supplement the seasonal nature of jobs in the hospitality sector and diversify the state economy that heavily relies on tourism. New revenue streams from offshore exploration and development could be used to improve our roads and bridges, making it easier and event more attractive for tourists to travel to our beaches.

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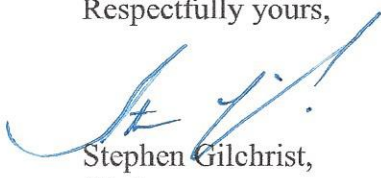
Beyond the clear economic benefits that this will bring to all South Carolinians, expansion of our energy production to include the Southeastern Atlantic will benefit our military – who, as you may be aware, is the single-largest fuel buyer in the United States. The more energy self-sufficient our country is the stronger is its national security, not to mention our military assets can be deployed more strategically when U.S. energy supplies are plentiful and can be used to help meet the world demand for energy.

With the significant technological advancements that have occurred in recent years, we can efficiently develop offshore natural gas and oil more safely now than ever before. Safety and reduced environmental impacts continue to be the highest priorities for the industry. The U.S. economy is growing and our carbon emissions are at their lowest levels in 25 years due in large part to our increased use of U.S. natural gas in electricity generation. Opening up the new areas in the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic OCS to energy exploration and development would help ensure the nation's continued energy leadership, strengthen the economy, and create job security for generation to come.

While we know this issue has created passionate debate, we want you to know that there is a strong, united group of South Carolinians who supports offshore natural gas and oil development as a means to lift up South Carolina's economy and strengthen our communities.

We look forward to working with you to address any questions you may have. On behalf of Explore Offshore members listed below, we thank you for your consideration of this opportunity to create a stronger South Carolina.

Respectfully yours,



Stephen Gilchrist,  
Chairman  
Explore Offshore for South Carolina  
President, African American Chamber of Commerce

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Explore Offshore for South Carolina is supported by the following organizations, associations, and individuals:

South Carolina African American Chamber  
Palmetto Promise  
South Carolina Association of Taxpayers  
South Carolina NFIB  
Associated Builders and Contractors of the Carolinas  
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Dr. Walter Curry, Claflin College  
Shaun Cox, Pivotal Health Solutions  
Greg Wright, Wright Direction Family Services

CC: Senator Lindsey Graham (SC)  
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Congressman William Timmons (SC-4)  
Congressman Ralph Norman (SC-5)  
Congressman Jim Clyburn (SC-6)  
Congressman Tom Rice (SC-7)