

explore Offshore

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

February 12, 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 Virginia 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 50 Virginia-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 Virginia 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 Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, 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 the Commonwealth 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 over \$1.8 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 25,000 new jobs in Virginia.

Careers in the natural gas and oil industry have an average salary of \$113,000 and frequently do not require a four-year degree. And importantly, these are jobs that are well-suited for our millions of veterans looking for employment in the civilian workforce. As the state seeks to create higher-paying jobs and diversify economically, this opportunity is one we can't afford to pass up. We urge you to consider the benefits of bringing the offshore natural gas and oil industry to Virginia.

Beyond the clear economic benefits that this will bring to all Virginians, 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. Increased domestic production of natural gas and oil is expected to reduce our economy's reliance on imports of energy resources from foreign nations, which often do not share our high democratic standards and are unreliable energy suppliers. The more energy self-sufficient our country is the stronger is its national

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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 generations to come.

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

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

Respectfully yours,

Mike Watson,
Chairman
Explore Offshore for Virginia
Former Member, Virginia House of Delegates (93rd District)

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

Environmental Standards
Virginia Chamber
Virginia Ship Repair Association
Prince William Chamber of Commerce
Columbia Gas of Virginia
Virginia Manufacturers Association
Advanced Integrated Technologies
Domestic Fuels and Lubes

VA Trucking Association
Virginia Marine Trades Association
Virginia Oil and Gas Association
Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy
VA Hispanic Chamber
NFIB- VA
VA Propane Gas Association
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C&M Industries	Metropolitan Business League
Shenandoah Appliance Plumbing and Electric	IntelliTechs
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