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April 20, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

Last November I wrote you requesting that a full investigation be conducted into the domestic offshore energy production activities of the Norwegian-based multinational drilling company called SeaDrill Limited ("SeaDrill"). I made this inquiry in the wake of one of the worst oil spills in Australian history, a disaster caused by a SeaDrill drilling rig in the East Timor Sea. In January of this year I received a letter from your agency stating that such an investigation would be undertaken promptly, and was personally assured by you later in a March 3rd hearing of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee that the results of my inquiry would be answered soon. I appreciate your responses, but to date, I have received no new information.

This issue has become increasingly crucial in light of news from SeaDrill that the company plans to expand its drilling operation in U.S. waters by acquiring a new Texas-based drilling company, Scorpion Offshore Ltd ("Scorpion"). It appears that SeaDrill has continued to grow and expand its drilling activities without the thorough investigation that I requested, and was assured would be completed. As the Obama Administration plans to expand oil and gas development along the East Coast and in the Gulf (a position I oppose), I am further concerned about the safety standards of this company and any others operating in our waters.

Our beaches are a tremendous resource and an essential economic engine. They are the centerpiece of tourism and fishing industries that are responsible for hundreds of thousands of jobs and tens of billions of dollars of revenue each year. Our shoreline is also an environmental treasure that serves as a natural habitat for wildlife and deserves to be protected in its own right.

Despite protestations from the industry, oil spills from offshore oil exploration and production happen all too often. As recently as April 6, an oil spill occurred 10 miles off the coast of Louisiana that released 18,000 gallons of oil into a nearby wildlife refuge. Incidents like this, and the disaster in Australia, are all too common and create the potential of incalculable damage to our coastal communities.

It is imperative that we fully understand the extent of SeaDrill's operations here in the United States and ensure they are operating as safely as possible. That is why I respectfully request a briefing on the details of your office's investigation into this firm and their compliance with American safety standards. I remain committed to taking all steps necessary to ensure that another incident does not threaten our waters, and would like to set up a meeting with you or between our staffs this month to discuss the findings of your review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert Menendez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator