

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 7, 2006

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Kempthorne:

We are writing to express our continued strong opposition to the Minerals Management Service's (MMS) plan to conduct lease sales in the Mid-Atlantic planning region off the coast of Virginia, as included in the Proposed 2007-2012 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Leasing Program and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

The beaches of New Jersey are a national treasure, and a vital source of income and pride for the state. Tourism is a \$26 billion industry in New Jersey, and is responsible for over 10 percent of the state's jobs. Our vibrant commercial and recreational fisheries are among the largest in the nation, generating over a billion dollars in revenue. In addition, the environmental value of our coastline—which provides crucial habitat for wildlife and a critical resting spot for countless migratory birds—is almost incalculable. Drilling in the Mid-Atlantic region would put all of this at enormous risk.

Our concerns have only been strengthened by news of pipeline spills on Alaska's North Slope, which were apparently caused by the pipeline operator's poor maintenance practices. These spills are stark reminders that oil and gas companies, despite their assurances, cannot be counted on to be careful stewards of the environment. Furthermore, recent reports indicate that Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were responsible for the leakage of hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil and petroleum products, despite earlier assertions by the industry that there were no serious leaks. The threat of a spill—whether caused by negligence, future hurricanes, or an unforeseeable accident—is simply too great for New Jerseyans to bear.

Because the potential impact of the 5-year Program on New Jersey is so large, we wrote to MMS Director Burton on March 14, 2006, asking her to hold public hearings on the Draft Proposed Plan in the state. Our request was denied, but in a July 3, 2006, response to a follow-up letter we sent, Director Burton wrote that you had "made the commitment that in the event the Proposed Program and draft Environmental Impact Statement include any activity on the Atlantic seaboard, that we will work with you to ensure that a meeting is scheduled to hear views concerning such activity." As there is still activity on the Atlantic seaboard in the Proposed Program and DEIS, we ask that you schedule multiple public hearings in the state of New Jersey as soon as practical.

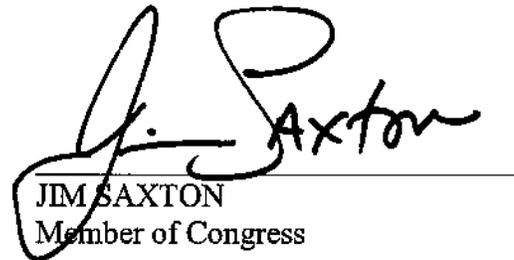
We look forward to working with you on this issue of critical importance to New Jersey.

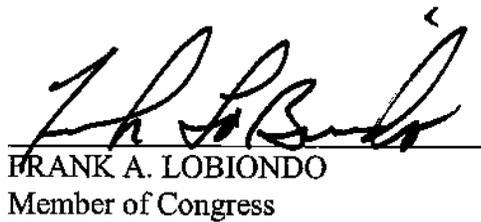
Sincerely,


ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator


FRANK R. LAUTENBERG
United States Senator


FRANK PALLONE
Member of Congress


JIM SAXTON
Member of Congress


FRANK A. LOBIONDO
Member of Congress


CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress