

MEMBER DAY TESTIMONY

House Interior-Environment Appropriations Subcommittee

Rep. Joe Cunningham

Good morning. Thank you, Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to speak before you today. As you know, I represent South Carolina's first district—a district blessed with an incredible coastline, good fishing and clean waterways. I am here to relay my district's concerns about the Administration's proposals to bring both offshore drilling and harmful seismic airgun blasting to Atlantic waters—including those off my district—as well as those of the Pacific and eastern Gulf of Mexico, which together support over 2.6 million American jobs and roughly \$180 billion in GDP.

Beginning in 1982, and for nearly three decades, Members of Congress listened to the concerns of the people they served, and restricted funding for federal offshore oil and gas leasing and drilling activities via the appropriations process. Thank you for working with me and our colleagues to reestablish similar provisions through amendments

to the FY2020 Interior-Environment Appropriations bill to limit spending on offshore oil and gas leasing along the aforementioned coasts. I urge you to include offshore drilling and exploration moratoria again as you craft the FY2021 base bill. It is vital that we engage the Senate to ensure these provisions are included in the final package. Without these moratoria provisions, we relinquish our role in influencing the future of offshore drilling to the executive branch.

Across the board, the expansion of offshore drilling is a threat to hardworking Americans, coastal economies, and marine life. When oil companies drill, they spill. Oil spills can have lasting consequences as we well know from the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* tragedy, which claimed the lives of 11 rig workers and spewed more than 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico as engineers tried and failed to cap the blowout. Oil exposure destroyed fragile marine ecosystems, tourism dropped throughout the region alongside beach closures and fishing restrictions, and real estate value declined in several Gulf Coast communities. Next month marks the 10-year anniversary of this terrible accident, yet the dirty and dangerous culture of offshore drilling remains

largely unchanged. In fact, last year the Trump administration took a step backward by weakening one of the few rules that had been implemented to prevent another *Deepwater Horizon*-like disaster.

Through the appropriations process, we have the power to block funding for this risky offshore development and prevent another large-scale spill before it happens.

Despite the Administration's stated abandonment of its five-year OCS plan, harmful oil exploration is imminent in the Atlantic Ocean if the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management issues final permits to seismic companies. Seismic airgun blasting in search of oil goes directly against the interests and wishes of my constituents. Creating one of the loudest manmade sounds in the ocean, noise from seismic airguns can disturb, injure, and even kill animals across the entire marine ecosystem. This unnecessary harm to the environment stands to threaten Atlantic marine resources that support over 1.5 million jobs and generate nearly \$108 billion in GDP each year, mainly through tourism, fishing and recreation. Any potential benefits of oil exploration are far outweighed

by the stable, recurring revenue and jobs our communities receive from healthy oceans.

Exposing our vibrant ocean resources to incredibly loud seismic airgun blasting and dangerous offshore drilling is simply not worth the risk. We are depending on your support again this year as you write and negotiate the FY2021 Interior-Environment Appropriations bill. I ask that you make it a priority to restrict funding for any new offshore oil leasing or related activities—including seismic airgun blasting—in the Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and eastern Gulf of Mexico. Please back our coastal communities, which have voiced consistent opposition to dangerous oil and gas activities. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.