

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Alan S. Lowenthal
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Oversight Hearing on

Evaluating Federal Offshore Oil and Gas Development on the Outer Continental Shelf

July 12, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Before getting into the offshore discussion, I'd like to just touch on a few things about onshore drilling.

Two weeks ago, we learned that oil and gas companies currently hold 7,950 approved drilling permits that they have not used.

We also learned that the so-called "backlog" of unprocessed drilling permits is the smallest in over a decade – roughly 2,800.

Take these two facts – a record high 8,000 permits waiting to be used, and a historically low number of permits waiting to be approved – and combine that with a glut of domestic oil so huge we're shipping it to other countries almost as fast as we can get it out of the ground, and you might think that speeding up drilling permit approvals shouldn't be a pressing issue.

But you'd be wrong.

Because last week Secretary Zinke announced a new effort to try to approve permits even faster. In doing so he said, "The Department of the Interior will be a better neighbor in the new Trump Administration."

If you're the kind of person who likes to live next to oil rigs, that will undoubtedly be true. Because the Department of the Interior and this Administration have made it clear they are fully devoted to giving the oil and gas industry anything it wants.

But if you live near public lands and appreciate clean water, or clean air, or the ability to hunt, fish, camp, hike, graze, or simply enjoy the scenic beauty of those lands, Interior is going to become the worst neighbor imaginable.

One of those places where clean water and scenic beauty are particularly important is our beaches. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, tourism and recreation along our Atlantic and Pacific coasts alone employs over 1.5 million people and creates 71 billion dollars in G-D-P.

Over 1 million of those jobs are on the East Coast. Think about that when you hear the industry-generated fantasies of 215,000 jobs if the entire Atlantic seaboard was open to drilling rigs.

Four times as many jobs would be at risk from the industrial facilities that would be built along the coast. Four times as many jobs would be at risk from the chronic pollution and pipeline spills that are widespread with offshore oil and gas.

And four times as many jobs would be at risk from a catastrophic blowout like the one we saw in the Gulf of Mexico only seven years ago.

Prior to the *Deepwater Horizon*, we were told time and time again that nothing like that could ever happen in the United States. The industry was too smart, and the technology too good, to ever let something like that happen. After all, it had been 40 years since the Santa Barbara blowout, which just showed that we were perfectly safe.

But we obviously were not safe.

We did learn a lot from the *Deepwater Horizon*, with hundreds upon hundreds of recommendations for improving the regulation, safety, and environmental impact of offshore drilling.

Some of the recommendations were aimed at Congress. We have not acted.

But many of those recommendations were taken to heart by the Obama Administration, which toughened the rules on drilling, required real safety plans from companies, and established an agency devoted to regulating safety offshore.

And with all that new regulation, what happened? Offshore oil production is now at an all-time high, and climbing. And in the first half of the year, nearly 400 offshore permits were approved, and only 23 are pending.

But now the Trump Administration wants to take us backwards. Currently they are reviewing all the new offshore policies with an eye not towards what makes us safer, but what makes things easier and more profitable for ExxonMobil, Shell, and BP.

And now they have decided to restart a new five-year leasing process, throwing away two and a half years and tens of millions of dollars of effort, ignoring the overwhelming bipartisan opposition from hundreds of thousands of people up and down the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and eliminating the protections that President Obama provided for the fragile Arctic.

Lifting regulations on the oil and gas industry while giving them more of our oceans to play with is a dangerous combination, and I fear it would just be a matter of time before we see a repeat of that horrible day seven years ago.

I yield back the balance of my time.