

**Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources**  
**Legislative Hearing**  
**Rep. Joe Cunningham**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today. This is an issue that is personal for me. It is my life's work and I came to this institution with a promise to address it. That is why last Thursday I introduced HR 1941, "The Coastal and Marine Economies Protection Act," which would permanently ban offshore drilling off the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts. I am proud to say this bill has bi-partisan support and I look forward to discussing the need for such a bill today.

According to the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, tourism is a \$22.6 billion industry in South Carolina and supports one in every 10 jobs in the Palmetto State. You cannot have both offshore drilling and the booming tourism industry that we have in the Lowcountry – they are mutually exclusive pursuits. And the fact of the matter is South Carolina's tourism industry holds a great deal more promise for statewide economic prosperity.

We often hear from the oil and gas industry that large spills are not common. I have said this before and I will say it again – there is no such thing as a small oil spill. When you drill, you spill. Nobody can truthfully look this Committee in the eye and say that there will be no spills if we drill.

Putting aside that inevitable risk, we also are confronted with another reality: offshore oil and gas comes with a large onshore footprint. BOEM's Draft Proposed Program includes oil and gas sales in the South Atlantic — which includes South Carolina — in 2020, 2022, and 2024. The Port of Charleston is one of the largest east coast ports and is critical to my state's economy and culture. Any development that occurs in the South Atlantic will require extensive onshore development, which could threaten the Port of Charleston. There is no offshore oil and gas support infrastructure on the east coast, so this would need to be built. This onshore infrastructure brings its own serious risks. For example, the Refugio Oil Spill of May 2015 released over 140,000 gallons of crude oil from a ruptured pipeline which fouled coastlines for miles.

And just to add an additional level of uncertainty to all of this, let us consider natural disasters for a moment. We have also seen spills from onshore infrastructure in the path of a hurricane -- Hurricane Katrina as the best-known example -- with roughly 8 million gallons estimated spilled.

Individuals of both parties have made clear to the Administration that they do not, will not, and *cannot* support offshore drilling. Despite this, we are all facing the looming fear of its possibility on our shores. I want to state this very

clearly for the record that every single city and town council along the South Carolina coastline has voted to oppose seismic testing and drilling<sup>[1]</sup>.

This is a matter of economic prosperity and the future of Charleston, Beaufort, Hilton Head, as well as many other coastal communities. However, I also feel it is a moral issue as well. *Genesis, Chapter 2, verse 15 states, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”* This teaches us to be stewards and caretakers of all creation. I find it unconscionable that we can knowingly damage our waters, and consequentially, our marine life for such a pursuit. Offshore drilling is reckless, harmful, and absolutely disruptive to the communities that we call home, and I urge my colleagues to support my bill to bring an end to this practice once and for all.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I give back the balance of my time.

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<sup>[1]</sup> “Fighting offshore drilling, McMaster appeals to his ‘good friend’ Trump.”  
<https://www.thestate.com/news/politics-government/article195211234.html>