

**Statement and Script – Chair Alan S. Lowenthal
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Legislative Hearing**

Protecting Coastal Communities and Ocean Resources from Offshore Drilling

H.R. 570, H.R. 2643, H.R. 2836, H.R. 3048, H.R. 3053, and H.R. 3116

May 13, 2021

Thank you, Congressman Levin, for serving as Chair in my absence and getting today's hearing underway.

I'll just make a brief statement, and then we can return to the second panel of witnesses.

Our oceans sustain a rich diversity of marine life and provide immense value to America's coastal communities. They help generate billions of dollars in economic output and support millions of good paying jobs.

Shoreline counties are home to over 125 million citizens – nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population – and the ocean economy employs more people than the telecommunications, crop production, and building construction industries combined.

In my home state of California, close to half a million people are employed in the fishing, seafood, aquaculture, coastal tourism, and recreation industries, and these jobs generate over 12 billion dollars in annual wages.

My state and many other coastal states that members of this committee represent understand that our existing economies are incompatible with more offshore oil and gas development.

California has seen offshore oil and gas threaten livelihoods firsthand multiple times.

In 1969, off the Coast of Santa Barbara, we saw the worst blowout in U.S. waters until the Deepwater Horizon blackened our beaches and killed millions of birds and wildlife.

In this same area just recently, a pipeline carrying crude oil from an offshore platform ruptured near several marine conservation areas. More beaches closed, and wildlife perished.

But it's not just Californians that are opposed to offshore drilling.

Americans from coast to coast have zero interest in handing more of our oceans over to oil and gas corporations.

Over the last four years, Americans were under constant threat by an administration committed to doing the bidding of the fossil fuel industry.

The Trump administration weakened drilling safety rules and pushed to open over 90 percent of the Outer Continental Shelf to oil and gas development.

Luckily, the Biden administration is charting a new course, one that listens to the concerns communities have about pollution from existing drilling and the potential harmful impacts of new development.

The Interior Department has paused offshore leasing while it conducts a comprehensive review of the federal oil and gas program, a much-needed step that will hopefully lead to reforms.

But a future administration might go right back to the Trump administration's playbook of opening America's oceans to new leasing, no matter the local opposition.

That's why the legislation we're considering today, and the bills my colleagues have testified on are so critical.

The bills authored by my colleagues would permanently protect the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and the eastern Gulf of Mexico from new oil and gas drilling.

With permanent protections, tackle shops, whale watching tours, and seafood markets off the coasts of Oregon, New Jersey, and Florida can feel at ease.

And restaurants, vacation rentals, and outfitters in California, Virginia, and the Carolinas can count on oil-free beaches and bays for future generations to enjoy.

But we also must protect the Gulf residents that live on the frontlines and experience the impacts of the offshore oil and gas industry every day.

For decades, Gulf communities have suffered from spills, air pollution, and loss of wetlands caused by offshore drilling and all the required onshore infrastructure.

Representative McEachin's bill would hold offshore operators accountable by requiring companies to publicly report critical safety system failures.

And Representative Brownley's bill would strengthen oversight and regulation of offshore pipelines, which the Government Accountability Office has identified as posing major threats to the environment, taxpayers, and communities.

Our coastal communities deserve protection from oil and gas pollution and certainty that their ways of life won't be jeopardized by new offshore drilling.

The bills we're considering today will help us achieve these goals, and I thank the sponsors for their tireless efforts to protect our coasts.

With that, we will proceed to our second panel of witnesses.