

Opening Statement – Chair Alan S. Lowenthal
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Oversight Hearing
What More Gulf of Mexico Oil and Gas Leasing Means for Achieving U.S. Climate Targets
Thursday, January 20, 2022

The Earth’s seven hottest years on record have all occurred since 2015, and 2021 was the ocean’s hottest for the third year in a row.

With a rapidly warming climate, the Biden administration must chart a course that leads the world to achieve our emission reduction goals.

And while the administration has taken numerous positive steps and is moving in the right direction, good is not nearly enough.

At the last subcommittee hearing in December, we looked at the climate implications of fossil fuel production on public lands managed by the Department of the Interior.

Today’s hearing is an opportunity to look offshore to the Gulf of Mexico, where the vast majority of federal leasing occurs.

Both Congress and the Biden Administration must do more to ensure that the management of our public waters aligns with the commitment to reduce emissions 52 percent from 2005 levels by 2030 and achieve economy-wide net-zero emissions by 2050.

But the November Gulf of Mexico lease sale and the Interior Department’s leasing report demonstrates that the Biden administration has not yet found the political courage necessary to confront the realities of climate change.

We need the administration to act boldly, but they don’t have to go it alone. They have allies in Congress and across the county ready to help them undertake this challenge of reducing our emissions.

Federal oil and gas leasing in the Gulf of Mexico produces nearly twenty percent of all carbon dioxide pollution from public lands and waters each year. The Gulf also spews out about twenty percent of all methane emissions from public lands and waters.

Oil and gas companies have stockpiled over 9 million acres of non-producing leases off our coastlines. And yet the Biden Administration used the June preliminary injunction as an excuse to sell off another 1.7 million acres to the oil and gas industry during the recent lease sale in November.

I strongly disagree with the Department's decision-making around this sale and found it particularly disappointing given the extensive commitments to addressing climate change that were made in Glasgow at the COP26 Climate Conference.

Secretary Haaland must ensure her Department accurately accounts for the damage the carbon pollution from leasing causes. And she must develop a long-term strategy to reduce emissions from all existing and new leases, starting with the next five-year leasing plan due out later this year.

While many of my colleagues and I are passionate supporters of the administration, we will continue to push them to follow the science and use the tools at their disposal to reduce emissions from America's public lands and waters.

The stakes are just too high for the health of our planet and future generations for us to maintain the status quo.

Reducing emissions from fossil fuel production has been an area of bipartisan agreement on this subcommittee, and I hope that we can discuss that shared goal during today's hearing.

Despite some claims otherwise, we know that reducing emissions from oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico will help reduce overall carbon emissions.

Research shows that, on average, eliminating one barrel of U.S. oil supply decreases global supply by about half a barrel. To put it simply, we can successfully reduce oil and gas leasing here in the United States without driving up emissions because of increased production overseas.

In addition to combating climate change, limiting fossil fuel leasing and extraction in federal waters will yield enormous health benefits for the communities that call the Gulf Coast region home.

For too long, the Gulf Coast has been treated as a sacrifice zone. The fossil fuel industry has been allowed to contaminate the water and air, causing disease and disproportionately high cancer rates.

Gulf Coast communities are also on the front lines of climate change, and sea-level rise, erosion, flooding, and more powerful storms will continue to wreak havoc until we reduce our emissions.

And we must reduce our emissions. Failure to do so will spell disaster for our climate and those Americans most impacted by the fossil fuel industry's toxic pollution.