H.R. 513, H.R. 931, H.R. 2250, H.R. 2556, H.R. 3168, AND H.R. 3176

LEGISLATIVE HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members

From: Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Staff, Rob MacGregor—(Robert.MacGregor@mail.house.gov), Will King—(Will.King@mail.house.gov), and Lonnie Smith—(Lonnie.Smith@ mail.house.gov) x5–9297

Date: Monday, May 19, 2025

Subject: Legislative Hearing on 6 bills

The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources will hold a legislative hearing on H.R. 513 (Rep. Higgins), *"Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025";* H.R. 931 (Rep. Downing), To allow certain Federal minerals to be mined consistent with the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification, and for other purposes; H.R. 2250 (Rep. DelBene), *"National LandPreparedness Act Reauthorization Act of 2025";* H.R. 2556 (Rep. Hunt) *"Comprehensive Offshore Resource Enhancement Act of 2025"* or the *"CORE Act of 2025";* H.R. 3168 (Rep. Valadao), *"National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program Reauthorization Act of 2025";* and H.R. 3176 (Rep. Begich), To amend the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act to reauthorize the National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System, on **Tuesday, May 20, 2025, at 2 p.m. in 1324 Longworth House Office Building.**

Member offices are requested to notify Jacob Greenberg (Jacob.Greenberg@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on May 19, 2025, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- H.R. 513 will nullify previous offshore energy withdrawals and limit the duration and size of future offshore energy withdrawals to bolster U.S. energy dominance, increase GDP, reduce trade deficits, and help balance the federal budget.
- The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) resource assessment process is outdated and susceptible to political interference. H.R. 2556 will modernize these assessments and ensure more accurate data collection for offshore oil and gas production, enhancing U.S. energy security and economic stability and reducing reliance on imports.
- The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) under the Biden administration purposefully delayed the permitting process for the Bull Mountains Mine in Montana for over two years. H.R. 931 will right this wrong and allow for responsible coal production in Montana, reducing energy costs for American families and providing much-needed revenue to states and the federal government.
- Natural Hazards such as lands, earthquakes, and volcanoes cost the government upwards of $20 billion per year.[1] H.R. 2250, H.R. 3168, and H.R. 3176 reauthorize the National Landslide Hazards Reduction Program, the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program, and the National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System, which aim to reduce the cost incurred by the government and save lives by providing early warnings to communities.

II. WITNESSES

Panel I (Members of Congress):
- **To Be Announced**

Panel II (Administration):
- **Dr. Walter Cruickshank,** Deputy Director, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC [*H.R. 513 & H.R. 2556*]

Panel III:
- **Mr. Cory Kief,** Director of Business Development, Crosby Tugs, LLC, Galliano, LA [*H.R. 513 & H.R. 2556*]
- **Mr. Parker Phipps,** CEO, Signal Peak Energy, Roundup, MT [*H.R. 931*]
- **Dr. Mike West,** Director and State Seismologist, Alaska Earthquake Center, Fairbanks, AK [*H.R. 2250, H.R. 3168, H.R. 3176*]
- **Mr. Doug Helton,** former Regional Operations Supervisor, Emergency Response Division, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Seattle, WA [*H.R. 513 & H.R. 2556*] (*Minority Witness*)

III. BACKGROUND

H.R. 513 (Rep. Higgins), *"Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025"*

The Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025 seeks to nullify specific Presidential withdrawals of offshore lands made under Section 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA).[2] The bill would also amend OCSLA to limit future Presidential withdrawals. By restoring access to these lands for oil and gas leasing, the bill aims to enhance energy security, support economic growth, and ensure Congressional oversight of offshore resource management.

On January 6, 2025, in the waning days of the last administration, President Biden recklessly issued a Presidential Memoranda withdrawing approximately 625 million acres of Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) lands in the Gulf of America and the Atlantic, Pacific, and Alaska planning areas from oil and gas leasing, citing environmental and climate concerns.[3] On January 20, 2025, President Trump revoked these withdrawals, restoring leasing eligibility.[4]

H.R. 513, introduced by Rep. Higgins on January 16, 2025, not only nullifies the most egregious existing OCS withdrawals but also limits future withdrawals to 150,000 acres per action, 500,000 acres cumulatively without Congressional approval, and ensures that each withdrawal only lasts 20 years in duration. The bill also mandates geological, economic, and security assessments before promulgating a withdrawal, requires withdrawals to be submitted for Congressional review with an expedited disapproval process, and ensures alignment with approved Five-Year Oil and Gas Leasing Programs, enhancing energy security and oversight.

Withdrawn Areas as of 2020 (left) and Areas unavailable for leasing as of January, 2025 (right). Source: U.S. Department of the Interior

H.R. 931 (Rep. Downing), To allow certain Federal minerals to be mined consistent with the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification.

Signal Peak Energy (SPE) currently operates the only underground coal mine in Montana: the Bull Mountain Mine.[5] Despite reserves that can last over 50 years,[6] the mine will soon run out of recoverable reserves as SPE cannot access federal coal tracts that run in a checkerboard pattern across the area.[7] SPE has been seeking OSMRE's approval to mine 1,835 acres of federal coal since 2013. OSMRE previously approved a mining plan modification along with an environmental assessment in 2015 and 2018 that would allow access to this acreage but both efforts were vacated by the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana in 2017[8] and 2023, respectively.[9] Specifically in the 2023 decision, Judge Donald W. Molloy vacated the mine modification and remanded the matter to the Department of the Interior to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS).[10] Despite receiving this decision in February of 2023, OSMRE waited six months before issuing a notice of intent to prepare the required EIS.[11] In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act deadlines, OSMRE is required to complete the EIS two years after the date the agency determines that an EIS is necessary,[12] which in this case was February 2025. Not shockingly, the OSMRE under the Biden administration dragged its feet and missed this deadline.

H.R. 931 would remedy this issue by requiring the Secretary of the Interior to approve the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification, allowing the mine and its 300 workers to continue operations.[13] Under the bill, all Federal coal reserves leased under Federal Coal Lease MTM 97988 would be permitted to be mined by the Secretary of the Interior. This bill is supported by the entire Montana delegation in the House and the Senate and mirrors a companion bill introduced by Senator Daines, S. 362. This mine plays a crucial role in the economy of Musselshell County by generating over $90 million annually in state, local, and federal taxes.[14] At a time when we need more energy, not less, this mine and its vast reserves must be authorized to continue operations.

H.R. 2250 (Rep. DelBene), *"National Landslide Preparedness Act Reauthorization Act of 2025"*

Landslides are a major geologic hazard in every state, causing between $1 and $2 billion in damages and more than 25 casualties annually.[15] The United States Geological Survey (USGS) established the Landslide Hazards Program (LHP) in the 1970s to research the Earth's geologic structure and draw scientific conclusions about landslides and ground failures.[16] The states utilize this research to prepare for and properly respond to these disasters.

The National Landslides Preparedness Act (NLPA) was passed in the House of Representatives in the 116th Congress and was signed into law on January 5, 2021.[17] The NLPA established the National Landslide Hazards Reduction Program (NLHRP) and the 3D Elevation Program (3DEP), authorizing both programs from 2021 to 2024. The programs allow USGS to gather data to enable states and communities to reduce loss in the event of a landslide. The Director of the USGS leads implementation of the NLHRP and coordinates with states, territories, and Indian tribes to coordinate data collection and share information.[18] The NLPA also charges the USGS with mapping and researching landslide hazards, responding to landslides, and coordinating with state, local, territorial, and tribal entities to reduce landslide risks.[19] The goal of 3DEP is to establish high-quality topographic elevation data of the entire U.S., enabling better understanding of landslides and why they occur.[20] USGS uses Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) technology when mapping the Earth.[21] By the end of fiscal year (FY) 2022, the USGS had elevation data gathered via LIDAR for 90 percent of the U.S.[22] 3DEP allows the USGS to gather new topography data and study how landslides shift the landscape from one year to the next. This allows USGS and the states to develop plans and procedures in the event of a landslide to minimize losses.

Landslides have affected numerous communities across the U.S. In 2018, Alaska experienced a devastating series of 43 landslides after a 7.1-magnitude earthquake hit just north of Anchorage.[23] This disaster caused $76 million in damage, but fortunately, there were no fatalities.[24] Heavy rainfall is the most common cause of landslides, particularly rainfall on burned, steeply sloped terrain (e.g., a post-wildfire debris flow).[25] H.R. 2250 reauthorizes NLHRP at $35 million, which represents an increased authorization of $10 million per year until FY 2030, over the current $25 million levels. It also authorizes 3DEP through FY 2030 at the current authorization of appropriations level of $40 million per year.[26]

H.R. 2556 (Rep. Hunt), *"Comprehensive Offshore Resource Enhancement Act of 2025" or the "CORE Act of 2025"*

The OCS is critical in the United States' energy strategy, providing substantial oil and natural gas resources that contribute to national energy security, economic stability, and coastal resiliency goals. BOEM periodically conducts resource assessments of the OCS and regularly prepares 5-year leasing plans as mandated by the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (EPAct05)[27] and OCSLA.[28] These assessments, which include Undiscovered Technically Recoverable Resources (UTRR) and Undiscovered Economically Recoverable Resources (UERR), are crucial for informed decision-making and contribute to 5-year program planning and development.[29] UTRR and UERR are critical components of BOEM's comprehensive inventory and analysis of oil and natural gas resources in the OCS. Undiscovered oil and gas resources in the OCS have the potential to significantly boost the U.S. economy while maintaining the U.S. edge in producing cleaner hydrocarbons than the rest of the world. For example, energy production occurring in the Gulf of America is 46% less carbon-intensive when displacing global production in countries like Russia, China, and Iran.[30]

Bilateral maritime boundary treaties, such as the 1990 US-Soviet Union (now Russia) Maritime Boundary Agreement and the 2000 US-Mexico Maritime Boundary Agreement, include provisions on sovereign rights over natural resources.[31] These agreements ensure that neither country can claim resources in the other's territory. The 2000 US-Mexico Agreement also addresses transboundary hydrocarbon reservoirs, establishing a framework for equitable and efficient development of such resources.[32] Looking to the north, ongoing disputes with Canada over jurisdictional rights to OCS areas, particularly in the Beaufort Sea, Gulf of Alaska, and Gulf of Maine, underscore the critical need to first delineate maritime boundaries to establish ownership before even considering potential transboundary resource development.[33] [34]

The CORE Act addresses the critical need for enhanced assessment of transboundary hydrocarbon reservoirs by requiring BOEM to leverage existing seismic data to resolve boundary disputes, examine unresolved boundaries for decision-maker clarity, and assess joint production feasibility. It also forces BOEM to assess activity by Cuba, Mexico, Canada, the Bahamas, and Russia to ensure compliance with transboundary agreements to determine whether U.S. revenue is protected from exploitation of cross-border reservoirs with our neighbors.

BOEM's current resource assessment process faces challenges in data acquisition, technological integration, and environmental impact considerations. Additionally, the two most recent analyses by BOEM skewed greatly in their findings. In 2016, BOEM reported UTRR totaled 91 billion barrels of oil (BBO), 328 trillion cubic feet (TCF) of gas, and 149 billion barrels of oil equivalent (BOE).[35] By 2021, these figures had dropped to 68 BBO, 229 TCF of gas, and 109 BOE.[36] The resulting decrease was not due to production, discoveries, seepage, or any rational cause. The CORE Act would amend EPAct05 to ensure that resource assessments include the latest data and methodologies for accurate and reliable estimates and would specifically detail what BOEM should consider in each assessment.

By improving BOEM's data acquisition methods, this bill will prompt an increase in domestic oil production, which will bring greater energy security, more affordable energy prices, a lower national trade deficit, and increased revenue passed to states for vital coastal restoration and infrastructure projects. Additionally, the bill would mandate an economic analysis to assess the potential for job creation from OCS development across exploration, production, refining, and logistics. The bill also commissions an evaluation on how development of OCS resources could supply fuel and materials for the Department of Defense and U.S. allies, and an analysis of how preventing realization of offshore energy receipts (bonuses, rents, and royalties) from producing these undiscovered resources could impact funding for states and coastal political subdivisions under federal laws that support costal protection, conservation and cultural preservation. Lastly, Section 3 of the bill requires the Secretary of the Interior to publish a comparative analysis of offshore oil and gas practices among major producing countries 1 year after enactment and every 10 years thereafter, comparing U.S. leasing practices to those of other offshore producing countries to assess our competitiveness.

The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a legislative hearing on the CORE Act on July 23, 2024.[37] Provisions that have changed in the current version include the addition of the Transboundary hydrocarbon analysis, U.S.-Canada collaborative boundary delineation instructions, changes to agency roles from Secretary of Defense to Secretary of State, addition of non-energy mineral resource analyses, and comparative analysis of other offshore producing countries' practices to those of the United States.

CORE Act Improvements vs. Current Process Deficiencies

	Proposed Improvements in the CORE Act	Key Deficiencies in Current Processes
Data Inputs	Prioritizes the use of advanced geophysical and geotechnical data, along with new modeling technologies, to improve resource estimates.	Existing resource assessments rely on outdated data and lack advanced technological integration, leading to uncertainty in resource estimates.
Economic Considerations	Assesses the impact of undiscovered resource production on the U.S. economy under different production scenarios, considering market dynamics and technological advancements.	There is insufficient analysis of the economic effects of expanded offshore production on the U.S. economy and on trade deficits.
Environmental Considerations	Evaluates the potential net greenhouse gas emission reductions from replacing imported oil and gas with domestic resources.	Current assessments do not fully account for the potential environmental benefits of domestic oil and gas production compared to imports which would occur as a result of non-production
Transboundary Resource Management	Enhances the assessment and management of transboundary hydrocarbon reservoirs, including legal frameworks and cooperation mechanisms with neighboring countries.	Transboundary Resources are not currently considered or specifically discussed in assessments and lack comprehensive analysis.

Analysis of the current BOEM process and the changes made by the bill

H.R. 3168 (Rep. Valadao), *"National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program Reauthorization Act of 2025"*

The USGS is in charge of monitoring and reporting earthquakes, assessing damage, and researching their causes and effects.[38] The National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP)[39] is aimed at gaining a better understanding of earthquakes while also reducing risks in the United States.[40] NEHRP is a joint agency effort led by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), with help from the USGS, the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).[41] These agencies work together to conduct science, but they also have individual goals for mitigating damage from earthquakes.

NEHRP was first authorized in 1977[42] with the goal of managing the impacts of earthquakes on life, property, and the economy.[43] The program was designed to achieve this goal through a large, coordinated effort between the community of earthquake professionals in academia, businesses, government agencies, and codes and standards organizations that develop earthquake building codes.[44] NEHRP has been reauthorized several times, and most recently in 2018.[45] This reauthorization in 2018 established the first operational earthquake early warning system in the United States aptly named ShakeAlert.[46]

Currently, ShakeAlert operates in California, Oregon, and Washington and aims to provide alerts to people who are in the affected areas of an earthquake.[47] This application, run by the USGS, can save thousands of lives and millions of dollars by alerting an individual's phone or other electronic device, notifying them that an earthquake has been detected. The application has successfully been integrated into several industries across the West Coast, specifically on the Metrolink in Southern California[48] It has been integrated into Metrolink's Positive Train Control systems to automatically slow or stop trains when an alert is received.[49]

H.R. 3168 reauthorizes NEHRP through FY 2030.

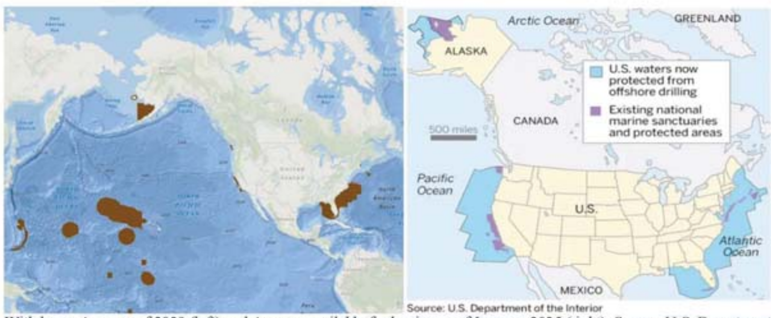
H.R. 3176 (Rep. Begich), To amend the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act to reauthorize the National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System.

The United States currently has about 170 young volcanoes, and roughly half of those pose a threat due to their proximity to communities and the intensity of their eruptions.[50] Many of these volcanoes are not adequately monitored, and others have no monitoring equipment.[51]

The National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System (NVEWS)[52] was established in 2019 through the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act.[53] This program was new in 2019 and falls under the Volcano Hazards Program (VHP) which has existed since 1980 and is also administered by USGS.[54] Congress authorized appropriations of $55 million for NVEWS from FY

2019 through FY 2023. In FY 2022, Congress appropriated an additional $2.2 million for NVEWS implementation and $1.8 million for the Mount Rainier lahar detection system out of the $33.3 million appropriated to the VHP.[55] The authorization for NVEWS expired at the end of FY 2023, but its programs have continued to operate as a part of VHP.

The USGS operates many volcano observatories across the country, the hubs of which are located in Alaska, California, Hawaii, and Washington.[56] These observatories electronically monitor and research volcanoes while remaining far enough away from the danger of an eruption. These observatories are outfitted with seismometers, GPS receivers, and gas sniffers to track seismicity or detect volcanic gas in the surrounding area.[57]



Withdrawn Areas as of 2020 (left) and Areas unavailable for leasing as of January, 2025 (right). Source: U.S. Department of the Interior

The goal of NVEWS is to monitor the most active and hazardous volcanoes to give ample time to evacuate the communities in the surrounding area of the volcano.[58] Hawaii is the most at risk state as the islands themselves are active volcanoes, so the nearby cities must be prepared for potential eruptions. Additionally, Alaska has the most volcanoes in its borders of any state at over 130 volcanoes and volcanic fields, and more than 50 have been active in the last 300 years.[59]

H.R. 3176 reauthorizes NVEWS through FY 2030.

IV. MAJOR PROVISIONS & ANALYSIS

H.R. 513 (Rep. Higgins), *"Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025"*

Section 2: Nullification of Specific Withdrawals:

- ○ Revokes eight Presidential memoranda and executive orders from 2014 to 2025 that withdrew offshore lands from mineral leasing, including areas in the Arctic, Atlantic, Gulf of America, and Pacific.

Section 3: Limitation of authority of the President to withdraw unleased offshore lands.

- **Withdrawal Restrictions (Section 12(a)(2)):**
- ○ Limits withdrawals to 150,000 acres per action, non-contiguous with other withdrawals, and caps the duration of each withdrawal at 20 years. A President's cumulative withdrawals are restricted to 500,000 acres without Congressional approval. These constraints aim to prevent broad, indefinite restrictions on offshore energy development while balancing executive flexibility.
- **Mandatory Assessments (Section 12(a)(3)):**
- ○ Requires the Secretary of the Interior to conduct mineral resource assessments within five years before a withdrawal, alongside economic, energy, and national security evaluations. Assessments must also quantify revenue losses to federal and state entities. These requirements ensure data-driven decisions, highlighting the impacts of withdrawals on the American economy.
- **Congressional Disapproval Mechanism (Section 12(a)(4)):**
- ○ Establishes a joint resolution process for Congress to disapprove withdrawals, with expedited Senate procedures. Disapproved withdrawals lose effect, and substantially similar withdrawals are barred without legislation.

This empowers Congress to check executive overreach and maintain access to offshore resources.

- **Judicial Review (Section 12(a)(4)(G)):**
  - Prohibits judicial review of actions under the disapproval process, shielding Congressional decisions from legal challenges and ensuring swift resolution of disputes over withdrawals.
- **Alignment with Leasing Programs (Section 12(a)(5)):**
  - Prohibits withdrawals that conflict with approved 5-year oil and gas leasing programs under Section 18 of OCSLA. This ensures consistency with established energy development plans, minimizing disruptions to leasing schedules.

H.R. 931 (Rep. Downing), To allow certain Federal minerals to be mined consistent with the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification

- Authorizes all Federal coal reserves in Montana leased under Lease MTM 97988 to be mined in accordance with the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification.

H.R. 2250 (Rep. DelBene), *"National Landslide Preparedness Act Reauthorization Act of 2025"*

- Reauthorizes NLHRP through FY 2030. Increases the previous authorization level by $10 million from $25 million to $35 million per year.
- Reauthorizes 3DEP through FY 2030. Maintains the previous authorization level of $40 million per year.

H.R. 2556 (Rep. Hunt), *"Comprehensive Offshore Resource Enhancement Act of 2025" or the "CORE Act of 2025"*

SEC. 2. Assessment of Offshore Resources

- **Transboundary Hydrocarbon Report (Section 2(b)):**
  - Requires the Secretaries of Energy, Interior, and State to submit a report within 18 months on transboundary hydrocarbon reservoirs. The report will identify reservoirs, analyze legal frameworks, evaluate economic and geopolitical implications, and recommend cooperative mechanisms with neighboring countries.
- **Standardized Resource Inventories (Section 2(c)):**
  - Amends 42 U.S.C. § 15912 to mandate the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with other agencies, to conduct offshore resource inventories every five years in the OCS. Inventories assess undiscovered resources, economic impacts, national security, and revenue effects of land withdrawals. This ensures regular, comprehensive data to guide leasing and policy decisions.
- **Model Updates and Assessments (Section 2(c)):**
  - Requires the Secretary to assess and update resource inventory models every 10 years, starting within one year of enactment, in consultation with industry experts.

SEC. 3. Comparative Analysis of Offshore Practices

- **Global Offshore Production Analysis:**
  - Mandates a comparative analysis every 10 years of offshore oil and gas practices in major producing countries. The analysis covers leasing acres, auction frequency, production volumes, and resource estimates, using USGS data and advanced technologies. This informs U.S. policy by benchmarking against global competitors, enhancing competitiveness and energy diversification.

H.R. 3168 (Rep. Valadao), *"National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program Reauthorization Act of 2025"*

- Reauthorizes NEHRP through FY 2030. Maintains the previous authorization level of $83.4 million per year.

H.R. 3176 (Rep. Begich), To amend the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act to reauthorize the National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System

- Reauthorizes NVEWS through FY 2030. Maintains the previous authorization level of $55 million over 5 years..

V. COST

A formal cost estimate from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is not available.

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE POSITION

Unknown.

VII. EFFECT ON CURRENT LAW (RAMSEYER)

H.R. 513
https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/bill-to-law_119hr513ih.pdf

H.R. 2250
https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/bill-to-law_119hr2556ih.pdf

H.R. 2556
https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/bill-to-law_119hr2556ih.pdf

H.R. 3168
https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/bill-to-law_h.r._3168.pdf

H.R. 3176
https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/bill-to-law_119hr3176ih.pdf

[1] USGS, USGS-FEMA study highlights economic earthquake risk in the United States, https://www.usgs.gov/news/national-news- release/new-usgs-fema-study-highlights-economic-earthquake- risk-united-states

[2] 43 U.S.C. 1341(a).

[3] The White House, Presidential Actions, Memorandum on the Withdrawal of Certain Areas of the United States Outer Continental Shelf from Oil or Natural Gas Leasing, https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/presidential- actions/2025/01/06/memorandum-on-the-withdrawal-of-certain- areas-of-the-united-states-outer-continental-shelf-from-oil-or- natural-gas-leasing-2/

[4] The White House, Presidential Actions, INITIAL RESCISSIONS OF HARMFUL EXECUTIVE ORDERS AND ACTIONS, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/initial- rescissions-of-harmful-executive-orders-and-actions/

[5] Signal Peak Energy, *Reimagining Underground Coal Mining*, (last visited Nov. 13, 2024), https://www.signalpeakenergy.com/about#:~:text=Signal%20Peak %20Energy%2C%20LLC%20is,and%20cutting%2Dedge%20prod uction%20methods.

[6] *Id.*

[7] Darrell Ehrlick, *Signal Peak sues Department of the Interior for stalling on coal lease, says mine may have to close*, Daily Montanan (Apr. 25, 2024), https://dailymontanan.com/2024/04/25/signal-peak-sues-blm-for- stalling-on-coal-lease-says-mine-may-have-to-close/.

[8] Mont. Envtl. Info. Ctr. v. U.S. Off of Surface Mining, 274 F. Supp. 3d 1074, 1105 (D. Mont. 2017), https://climatecasechart.com/wp-content/uploads/case- documents/2017/20170814_docket-915-cv-00106_order-1.pdf.

[9] 350 Mont. v. Haaland, 2023 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 23219 (D.Mont. Feb. 10, 2023), https://climatecasechart.com/wp- content/uploads/case-documents/2023/20230210_docket-919-cv- 00012_order.pdf.

[10] *Id.*

[11] Department of the Interior, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Signal Peak Energy, LLC's Federal Mine Plan for Federal Lease MTM-97988; Bull Mountains Mine Amendment 3 and 5 EIS, 8/07/23, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/08/07/2023- 16846/notice-of-intent-to-prepare-an-environmental-impact- statement-for-signal-peak-energy-llcs-federal.

[12] 42 U.S.C. 4336a(g)(1)(A)(i).

[13] Darrell Ehrlick, *Signal Peak sues Department of the Interior for stalling on coal lease, says mine may have to close*, Daily Montanan (Apr. 25, 2024), https://dailymontanan.com/2024/04/25/signal-peak-sues-blm-for- stalling-on-coal-lease-says-mine-may-have-to-close/.

[14] *Id.*

[15] USGS. What We Do – Landslide Hazards Program. https://www.usgs.gov/programs/landslide-hazards/what-we-do- landslide-hazards-program#:~:text=On%20January%205%2C%202021%20the%20N ational%20Landslide%20Preparedness%20Act%20(P.L.

[16] *Id.*

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LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON: H.R. 513, OFFSHORE LANDS AUTHORITIES ACT OF 2025; H.R. 931, TO ALLOW CERTAIN FEDERAL MINERALS TO BE MINED CONSISTENT WITH THE BULL MOUNTAINS MINING PLAN MODIFICATION, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES; H.R. 2250, NATIONAL LANDSLIDE PREPAREDNESS ACT REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2025; H.R. 2556, COMPREHENSIVE OFFSHORE RESOURCE EVALUATION ACT OF 2025, OR THE CORE ACT OF 2025; H.R. 3168, NATIONAL EARTHQUAKE HAZARDS REDUCTION PROGRAM REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2025; AND H.R. 3176, TO AMEND THE JOHN D. DINGELL, JR. CONSERVATION, MANAGEMENT, AND RECREATION ACT TO REAUTHORIZE THE NATIONAL VOLCANO EARLY WARNING AND MONITORING SYSTEM

Tuesday, May 20, 2025
House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:20 p.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Pete Stauber [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Stauber, Hunt, Hageman, Ezell, Begich, Hurd, Westerman; Ansari, Elfreth, and Rivas.

Also present: Representative Downing, Higgins, Valadao; DelBene, and Pallone.

Mr. STAUBER. The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources will come to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

Under Committee rule 4(f), any oral opening statements and hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member.

I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Pallone, be allowed to participate in today's hearing; the gentlewoman from Washington, Ms. DelBene, be allowed to participate in today's hearing; the gentleman from California, Mr. Valadao, be allowed to participate in today's hearing; the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, be allowed to participate in today's hearing; and the gentleman from Montana, Mr. Downing, be allowed to participate in today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. PETE STAUBER, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you all for being here today to discuss these important pieces of legislation. The bills we have before us today address a range of topics, including the Biden administration's lackluster energy policies that continue to harm our Nation's energy security, as well as the United States Geological Survey's Hazardous Missions Area.

H.R. 931, introduced by Representative Downing, would allow certain Federal coal resources to be mined consistent with the Bull Mountains Mining Plan modification. Currently, the leased coal reserves in this mine are set to run out by the end of this year unless congressional action is taken. The Biden administration blatantly violated the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, by failing to promptly start the environmental review process required under the law. Whether they did so purposefully no longer matters, as Congress must act to right this wrong and prevent an economic situation in the surrounding rural communities.

We also have three pieces of legislation to authorize three different hazards programs at the USGS. The bills include H.R. 2250 from Representative DelBene; H.R. 3168 from Representative Valadao; and H.R. 3176 from Representative Begich. These bills would authorize important programs that help save lives and protect our communities, including the National Landslide Hazard Reduction Program, or NLHRP; the 3D Elevation Program, or 3DEP; the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program, or NEHRP; and the National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System, NVEWS. NLHRP and 3DEP play vital roles in mitigating the effects of natural hazards caused by landslides. NEHRP established the ShakeAlert application, which provides earthquake early warnings to Americans living and working on the West Coast of the United States. NVEWS monitors and warns communities near and around volcanoes when volcanic activity is imminent.

Representative Higgins's H.R. 513 limits the ability of the Federal Government to lock up offshore oil and gas development which is critical not only for our energy security but also our strategic national security. This bill addresses a similar issue to what my constituents have experienced.

I cannot express my disappointment in the Biden administration's decision to withdraw over 225,000 acres in my home State of Minnesota, restricting access to the Duluth Complex, which is the largest untapped copper nickel find in the world.

Similarly, in the waning days of his administration, President Biden announced a withdrawal of over 625 million acres on the Outer Continental Shelf. The Biden administration's offshore energy lockups, along with their onshore mineral withdrawals, have cost Americans thousands of good-paying, often union jobs that are economic drivers in our respective local communities. These misguided actions threaten our long-term energy security and only serve to placate radical environmentalists who wish to divert energy and mining production overseas.

H.R. 513 nullifies 8 expansive withdrawals from the Arctic to the Gulf unlocking roughly 40 million barrels of oil and over 175 trillion cubic feet of gas in these areas, according to BOEM. Additionally, the bill would cap future withdrawals at 150,000 acres, limit withdrawals to 20 years, and mandate economic and resource assessments be completed before a withdrawal may take place.

The last piece is especially important because when Secretary Haaland banned 225,000 acres of mining in the Duluth Complex and the Superior National Forest in northeastern Minnesota, in a Senate hearing, when asked, her comments were, "I did not think there were critical minerals in there." Ladies and gentleman, it's the biggest untapped copper nickel find in the world, and she signed off to ban, did not even know what was in that complex. By requiring an economic and resource assessment prior to withdrawal, future secretaries and future administrations will know exactly what kind of minerals and energy resources they are locking up and exactly how their lockups will hurt the American people and our economy.

Lastly, Representative Hunt's bill, H.R. 2556, or the CORE Act, would enhance offshore resource assessments with precise resource mapping. By strengthening the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management assessments, the CORE Act reduces uncertainty, bolsters U.S. leasing competitiveness, and will deliver benefits to taxpayers and coastal communities. Together, these bills shatter arbitrary barriers restoring America's offshore energy supremacy.

And I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on these bills.

Mr. STAUBER. And I will now yield to the Ranking Member for her opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. YASSAMIN ANSARI, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA

Ms. ANSARI. Good afternoon, everyone. It is nice to see you, Chair Stauber. I wanted to start off, thank you, with a special thank you to Dr. Walter Cruickshank for being here today.

I understand that you are nearing retirement after a four-decade-plus-long career in public service at the Department of the Interior, and we are very grateful for your service.

We are here today to discuss six bills in the Subcommittee's jurisdiction: two on offshore drilling, one on a controversial coal mine, and three bipartisan United States Geological Survey hazard program reauthorizations. Let's dive in, starting with offshore drilling.

I will start by saying clearly: there is no energy emergency, and we do not need to expand unfettered, unregulated fossil fuel development. The United States is already producing more oil and gas than any country in history, and yet energy costs are still pinching at Americans' pocketbooks. This phenomenon has a simple explanation: prices are high because the oil industry does not put America first; they put profits first.

Big oil is already sitting on nearly 2,000 unused leases in the Gulf, covering almost 10 million acres of Federal waters, just waiting for the price per barrel to go up before producing so they can make more money. Yet, Republicans are giving them even more control of your coasts and waters with H.R. 513.

This bill overturns Biden and Obama-era protections against offshore drilling for the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, for the Arctic, and for the Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area, an area co-managed by Tribes to protect fishing grounds and other resources. Notably, this bill leaves intact the Trump-era protections for the coast of North Carolina, the Southeast, and the Eastern Gulf because Republicans know backlash from their own party would be unbearable.

And Republicans are not stopping there. To make development even more enticing, Republicans would have taxpayers subsidize even more of the cost of doing business, like exploratory testing. That is what H.R. 2556, the CORE Act, would do, directing the Federal Government to do risky, harmful seismic testing across all of our coasts at the taxpayer's expense. This is on top of $15 billion in direct subsidies that we already give to the fossil fuel industry every single year.

And meanwhile, this Administration and its friends in Congress are firing critical agency staff while slashing budgets to the bone. Our Federal agencies will have to make hard decisions with their limited resources like choosing between sending staff out to do safety inspections on oil rigs or having them do exploratory testing on the industry's behalf. Is this really how the American people want to spend their own money, cutting essential safety checks so that we can pay for big oil's exploration?

Republicans will stop at nothing to give away our public lands and waters to the dirty fossil fuel industry just hoping that this time the industry will be nice to us in return. That is just what is happening in H.R. 931. This bill would authorize the expansion of the Bull Mountains Mine, which produces Federal coal in Montana. This mine expansion has been shot down twice by the courts for insufficient environmental analysis, and the company that owns the mine has only just gotten off probation with the Department of Justice. The cherry on top? The coal mine that this mine produces is exported. It is not even for American energy. But we know how this ends. These efforts will not end with lower prices, but with more pollution, more disease, more climate chaos, and the rich getting richer while you pay their bills.

I remind my colleagues here and the American public at home that we do not have to stay stuck in this loop. Fossil fuels are not our only option. Renewable energy is cheaper and just as reliable as fossil fuels, and that is without factoring in the extra cost of cleaning up oil spills or hospital bills for pollution-induced asthma. We can and we must do better.

Finally, I am happy to support the three natural hazard reauthorization bills, although I would like to remind my colleagues across the aisle that we are actively seeing the President go outside of his authority to kneecap nearly all of Interior, including the USGS employees who are implementing these essential programs.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much. Now I will begin our member panel to allow bill sponsors to speak on their legislation. I will now recognize Mr. Hunt from Texas's 38th congressional district for his testimony on his bill.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. WESLEY HUNT, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS

Mr. HUNT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the witnesses for joining us today.

In 2011 the Obama administration reported that 162 billion barrels of oil equivalent were in the Outer Continental Shelf, the OCS. And in 2016, also during the Obama administration, BOEM reported 149 barrels of oil equivalent in the OCS. The difference in undiscovered reserves in the OCS from 2011 through 2015 under President Obama was actually pretty normal.

Let's fast forward to 2021 and BOEM, under the Biden administration, reported 109 billion barrels of oil equivalent undiscovered in the OCS, the lowest reported number in decades. One of the worst-kept secrets in Washington is that Biden's BOEM was incredibly impartial, even aggressive at times, toward our domestic oil and gas industry which then begs the question: Were these 2021 BOEM numbers accurate, or were they another attempt at harming our energy industry in the Gulf of America?

Following BOEM's reported numbers came the worst 5-year leasing plan in our Nation's history, offering the fewest number of offshore oil and gas leases ever. This action left us with an oil and gas industry that is now scrambling to reestablish itself as a global leader and meet the market's demand. And this is why my legislation, the Comprehensive Offshore Resource Evaluation Act, or the CORE Act, is so important.

Oil and gas will continue to be an important part of our energy mix, and not only today and tomorrow, but also in our near and distant future. And if you think otherwise, you are simply fooling yourself. Taking politics out of BOEM and giving it guardrails is imperative to the future of our national security and energy security.

And lastly, section 4 of the CORE Act relates to geological and geophysical permitting and surveys which are crucial to the exploration and development of our offshore oil and gas resources. Accurate G&G data is essential for identifying potential deposits, estimating their size, and understanding their characteristics so that our offshore workers can do their job. Improving BOEM's data acquisition methods will prompt an increase in domestic oil production which will bring greater energy security to our Nation, more affordable energy prices for all of our families, and lower national trade deficits, and increased revenue to States for vital coastal restoration and infrastructure projects.

And just as a reminder, the Gulf of America produces the cleanest and most efficient barrel of oil found anywhere in the world. In fact, it is 46 percent less carbon-intensive than oil produced in Russia, China, and Iran.

The American people deserve an honest oil and gas assessment process. And with this bill we can deliver for all American families.

Mr. HUNT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and with that I yield back the rest of my time.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much. I now recognize Mr. Begich from Alaska's at-large congressional district for his testimony on his bill.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. NICK BEGICH III, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ALASKA

Mr. BEGICH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on H.R. 3176, my bill to reauthorize the National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System, or NVEWS.

As the representative for Alaska, where over 50 active volcanoes define our landscape and daily risk profile, this legislation is not just timely, it is also essential. Alaska is home to the vast majority of the Nation's active volcanoes. These aren't remote curiosities. Many sit beneath international air routes and near major population centers.

Mount Spurr, located just 80 miles from Anchorage, is currently in a state of volcanic unrest. It remains at a yellow alert level as of today due to elevated seismicity, gas emissions, and ground deformation. While the short-term eruption risk has slightly decreased since March, an event similar to those in 1953 or 1992 remains a very real possibility. This is not a theoretical threat in Alaska. This is happening now. And if Mount Spurr erupts, ashfall could shut down aviation, damage critical infrastructure, and pose a public health emergency.

H.R. 3176 is a straightforward, 5-year reauthorization that maintains current funding levels. It provides continuity for the U.S. Geological Survey and its partners to keep operating and upgrading our volcano monitoring networks. It prioritizes instrumentation at high-threat volcanoes, ensures rapid data transmission, and supports real-time coordination with State agencies and emergency responders, all of which are especially critical in remote, high-risk States like Alaska.

Volcanic hazards are not hypothetical. They are active and present. Mount Spurr's activity today underscores the need for preparedness over complacency. Early warnings save lives, protect property, and reduce the cost of emergency response. In Alaska, where terrain, distance, and weather already complicate disaster logistics, this system gives us a fighting chance.

The National Volcano Early Warning System has always had bipartisan backing. This reauthorization is a pragmatic, measured step that keeps a proven system running without expanding scope or increasing appropriations.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill and ensure that communities living in the shadow of volcanoes, especially in Alaska, have the tools they need to stay safe.

Mr. BEGICH. And with that I yield the balance of my time.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you. I now recognize Ms. DelBene from Washington's 1st congressional district for her testimony on her bill.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. SUZAN DELBENE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

Ms. DELBENE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you and the Ranking Member for holding this important hearing and inviting me to provide testimony on my legislation to reauthorize the National Landslide Preparedness Act.

Landslides kill 20 to 50 people and cause between $2 and $4 billion in damage each year. And unfortunately, this is a reality that people back in my district know all too well. Eleven years ago, on March 22, 2014, Washington experienced one of our Nation's worst natural disasters. In a matter of seconds, the side of a mountain, a tragic, massive landslide near Oso, Washington killed 43 people, destroyed an entire neighborhood of over 40 homes, and severely damaged public infrastructure and private property. That day forever changed the people of Oso, Darrington, Arlington, the Stillaguamish and Sauk-Suiattle Tribes, and they are still living with its scars today.

I went to Oso immediately after the disaster to support the community and families who had lost loved ones and their homes. Our first responders were the true heroes that day, and they worked countless days and nights trying to save lives and recover loved ones. These were some of the most heartbreaking days of my time in office.

Following that tragedy, in 2016, I introduced the National Landslide Preparedness Act. As the Oso landslide demonstrated, simply sending aid after a tragic natural disaster is not enough. We need to invest in programs and research efforts to prevent future natural disasters from becoming national tragedies. I worked tirelessly to get the National Landslide Preparedness Act signed into law in 2021, with the support of many of you in this room today.

This law established a National Landslide Hazards Reduction Program through the United States Geological Survey to better identify and understand landslide risks, protect communities, save lives and property, and help improve emergency preparedness. It also authorized the 3D Elevation Program, which in the past few years has made incredible strides to update and coordinate the collection of enhanced, high-resolution, topographical data across the country.

In addition to helping communities plan for and respond to natural hazards, this data is being used to improve public safety, national security, infrastructure, agriculture, and natural resource management. Through this law, we made significant progress in landslide science, allowing communities to be better prepared for when landslides do occur. And it couldn't come soon enough. In recent years we have seen dramatic increases in extreme weather events. We need to do everything in our power to make sure that communities across the country continue to have the tools at their disposal to be prepared.

The programs authorized by the National Landslide Preparedness Act expired in September of last year. I was encouraged that the House passed the legislation last Congress, but we know that nothing really changes until this bill makes it to the President's desk. I introduced the reauthorization bill along with Representatives Schrier, Gluesenkamp Perez, Newhouse, and most of the Washington delegation to reauthorize these programs through 2030. This bill has bipartisan and bicameral support. Senators Cantwell and Murkowski will be leading the effort in the Senate.

Every State across the country faces landslide risks, which is why we must reauthorize these critical programs. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on the need to reauthorize the National Landslide Preparedness Act.

Ms. DELBENE. And I yield back.

Mr. EZELL [presiding]. We thank the gentlewoman for her testimony. I now recognize Mr. David Valadao from California's 22nd congressional district for his testimony on his bill.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. DAVID VALADAO, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, and I want to thank the Chairman Stauber and Ranking Member Ansari for having me. I am here today in support of my bill, H.R. 3168, the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program Reauthorization Act of 2025.

Every year California faces hundreds of earthquakes, and more than 70 percent of our State's population lives within 30 miles of a fault line. My district in Central Valley is surrounded by faults. The San Andreas to the west, the Garlock to the south, the Sierra Nevada faults to the east create extreme risk for those living in and around the valley. Ensuring my constituents in California's 22nd congressional district are protected from extreme natural disasters, is one of my top priorities, and this bill is a great first step.

While earthquakes might cause billions of dollars in damage to infrastructure, the real cost is in the lives lost in these catastrophes. Investing in critical warning detection systems like the ShakeAlert and providing researchers with the tools needed to make scientific break-throughs in earthquake damage mitigation is crucial to ensuring people are, as safe as possible.

This bipartisan bill would reauthorize the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program through Fiscal Year 2030 to provide resources for the development, research, and implementation of lifesaving earthquake risk reduction and safety technology.

I am proud to lead this legislation with my California colleague, Jim Costa, and I want to thank Chairman Stauber and his staff for their work on this important bill.

The Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program has saved thousands of lives and billions of dollars, and I look forward to working with this Committee and our colleagues on the Science, Space, and Technology Committee to fully reauthorize this critical program. Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. VALADAO. Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. EZELL. I thank the gentleman for his testimony. I now recognize Mr. Clay Higgins from Louisiana's 3rd congressional district for his testimony on this bill.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. CLAY HIGGINS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF LOUISIANA

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the Ranking Member for allowing me an opportunity to waive on to today's Subcommittee hearing.

The production of reliable, transportable, and affordable energy product is a cornerstone of economic prosperity, and it is a topic that my bill seeks to address, H.R. 513, the Offshore Lands Authorities Act.

America has a responsibility to lead the world in the effort of energy production, and nowhere is the production of oil and gas energy product cleaner than here in the United States. Private industry innovations, not heavy-handed government mandates have allowed the United States to become a global leader in emissions reduction.

However, my colleagues across the aisle have for decades sought to align the Federal Government against the oil and gas and petrochemical industries. In the final days of his administration, Joe Biden furthered that agenda with the withdrawal of over 625 million acres of Federal waters from leasing and potential development. Closing those offshore lands to energy producers does not change the demand for reliable energy product, nor does it reduce overall production of oil and gas on a global scale. What the Biden drilling ban does is shift energy production to foreign producers, raises energy costs for American families, and threatens jobs and economic growth domestically. When President Biden closed 625 million acres on the Outer Continental shelf to American producers, there was zero acres closed in Russia and China.

The Federal Government should be a partner to America's energy industry, not a predator. That is why I introduced H.R. 513, the Offshore Lands Authorities Act, with Congressman Hunt, who serves on this Subcommittee, and many other conservatives. Our bill repeals the Biden drilling ban and helps codify the action President Trump took on day one to unleash America's potential to produce clean, abundant, and affordable energy.

The Offshore Lands Authorities Act also establishes guardrails to provide predictability and consistency in future leasing. The bill safeguards America's role as a leader in energy production, enacts boundaries on any future land withdrawal, and increases congressional oversight on decisions made through the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act.

Continued energy exploration and development of offshore lands requires stability in the leasing process. Radical pendulum swings driven by political disdain for the oil and gas industry or support, that swing threatens America's energy and economic security because it reduces consistency and reliability in leasing. Congress should take action to protect responsible energy production, restore production in American policies, and safeguard access to lease Federal lands and waters. Our legislation accomplishes this goal, and I encourage my colleagues to strongly support H.R. 513, the Offshore Land Authorities Act.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to introduce a letter from Americans for Prosperity in support of my bill.

Mr. EZELL. Without objection.

[The letter follows:]

AMERICANS for PROSPERITY

Tuesday, May 20th, 2025

Dear Members of the Natural Resources Committee:

On behalf of Americans for Prosperity grassroots activists across the country, we urge your support for Congressman Clay Higgins' H.R. 513 – the Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025.

During the Biden administration, last-minute presidential memoranda withdrew vast areas of federal lands in the Outer Continental Shelf from oil and gas lease sales. These actions immediately denied American taxpayers access to valuable resources critical to our economic security, national security, and energy reliability. While the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act grants the president authority to make such withdrawals, the use of that authority—originally written in the mid-20th century—to unilaterally withdraw 625 million acres without Congressional approval is unprecedented.

Thankfully, Congressman Higgins' legislation nullifies a number of offshore land withdrawals, including former President Biden's withdrawals of January 6, 2025, and limits the withdrawal a President can make to 150,000 acres for a period no longer than 20 years. No President may withdraw more than 500,000 acres cumulatively without Congressional approval. At a time when the nation needs additional energy resources and federal revenue, it is unwise to remove large swaths of the Outer Continental Shelf from productive use. Moreover, politically motivated decisions—such as President Biden's January 6, 2025, order—undermine public trust in the responsible stewardship of federal resources.

As the legislative branch, Congress has a duty to oversee policies governing the Outer Continental Shelf and ensure responsible productivity on federal lands and waters. Congressman Higgins' bill introduces common-sense reforms aligned with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's five-year offshore leasing plan, as mandated by Congress for the benefit of American taxpayers and consumers.

As the Energy & Mineral Resources Subcommittee considers this legislation today, we strongly urge your support—and ask that you continue to support it when it comes before the full committee for markup in the near future.

Sincerely,

Brent Gardner
Chief Government Affairs Officer
Americans for Prosperity \

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD017.pdf

Mr. HIGGINS. I yield, sir, thank you.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields. the Chair now recognizes the full Committee Chairman, Mr. Bruce Westerman, for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. BRUCE WESTERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARKANSAS

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate you for holding this hearing and for shepherding these important bills forward, and Representative Stauber's leadership on that.

You know, U.S. peak energy demand is now projected to grow by as much as 128 gigawatts through 2029, which is a fivefold increase from earlier forecasts. Now more than ever, long-term American energy dominance is essential to our economic and our national security. To meet this skyrocketing energy demand we must increase energy production everywhere, including on our Federal lands and waters.

While the Federal Government owns 61 percent of America's onshore and 99 percent of America's offshore mineral estate, only 25 percent of domestic oil and 11 percent of domestic natural gas come from Federal lands and waters. Responsibly utilizing these resources is critical to America's social and economic future.

H.R. 2556, the CORE Act of 2025, introduced by Representative Hunt, would help address these concerns by transforming how we map America's offshore energy wealth. The CORE Act mandates state-of-the-art tools such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and seismic surveys to locate and assess oil, gas, and minerals like polymetallic nodules and ferromanganese crust.

The bill also requires offshore resource inventories every 5 years, evaluating jobs, global market impacts, and withdrawal effects while fostering collaboration with neighbors like Canada, studying shared reservoirs, and settling border disputes diplomatically. This analysis will sharpen our competitive edge and ensure U.S. leasing practices are attractive and are attracting investment, not sending producers overseas.

H.R. 513, introduced by Representative Higgins from Louisiana, would also support long-term energy dependence by lifting overly expansive offshore withdrawals, ensuring access to offshore resources for future generations. H.R. 513 would also set commonsense limits on the size and duration of any future offshore withdrawals, guarding against unilateral decisions that weaken America's energy future.

Together, these bills empower America with clear-eyed strategic energy policies for a resilient, thriving future.

Representative Downing's H.R. 931 would finally allow access to Federal coal reserves at the Bull Mountain Mine in Montana. The Bull Mountain Mine in Roundup, Montana, has been mired in litigation and procedural hurdles for over a decade. This is a perfect case study of how our permitting processes are failing everyday Americans, and why we need permitting reform along with judicial reform, and we need that badly. Congressional action must now be taken due to major judicial and administrative delays that have jeopardized this mine and the livelihoods of over 300 hard-working people in Montana.

The three other bills before us today would reauthorize several critical programs in the United States Geological Survey's Hazard missions area.

Representative DelBene's H.R. 2250 would reauthorize the National Landslide Hazard Reduction Program and the 3D Elevation Program, which allows USGS to gather data that enables States and communities to reduce damages in the event of a landslide.

H.R. 3168, introduced by Representative Valadao, would reauthorize the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program, which aims to manage the impacts of earthquakes on life, property, and the economy by providing critical data for building codes and supporting an earthquake early warning system.

H.R. 3176, introduced by Representative Begich, would reauthorize the National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System, through which the USGS monitors the most active and hazardous volcanoes to give ample time to evacuate nearby communities.

It is impossible to prevent a landslide, an earthquake, or a volcanic eruption, so the best course of action is to prepare the community in the event of a disaster and send early warnings to those in the affected area to give them precious time to react before disaster strikes. These programs have already demonstrated the ability to save lives through advanced building codes being developed by Federal agencies, and the USGS has proven it can mitigate the economic impact from these through advances in early warning and monitoring systems.

I look forward to hearing the remainder of the testimony from our witnesses.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And I yield back.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields back. I now recognize Mr. Troy Downing from Montana's 2nd congressional district for his testimony on his bill.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. TROY DOWNING, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MONTANA

Mr. DOWNING. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of H.R. 931. This is legislation I introduced to protect Montana jobs and preserve one of the most important economic anchors in my district, the Bull Mountains Mine. This is not a theoretical problem. This is a real crisis unfolding in real time for over 250 workers and their families in Musselshell and Yellowstone County. Without action from Congress, Montana's only underground coal mine could be forced to shut down by the end of the year.

The Bull Mountains Mine is a major contributor to Montana's economy and local tax base. Its operations support hundreds of high-paying jobs, and the revenue it generates helps fund our schools, county governments, and infrastructure. In recent years it has contributed tens of millions of dollars in tax revenue and invested significantly in local services and scholarships. This is a home-grown operation that supports the long-term well-being of the community around it.

Right now, the longwall mine is up against a wall, not because of a market failure or a drop in demand, but because of a bureaucratic bottleneck. The company has been seeking Federal clearance to continue mining in AM3, amendment three, which contains a mix of Federal, State, and private coal. This land pattern is complicated, but the issue is simple. Because the Federal coal lies along State and private tracks in a checkerboard pattern, access to one is dependent on access to the others. When access to the Federal coal is blocked, the rest becomes inaccessible as well.

Due to Federal court ruling, the mine is currently barred from producing Federal coal in amendment three until an updated environmental impact statement is completed. Now, this process was supposed to be done by now, but it is behind schedule, and the clock is ticking. If the mine cannot access this coal soon, the operation will have to shut down. That means families in Roundup, Billings, and nearby towns will lose their paychecks. It means school districts will lose a key source of revenue, and it means Montana will lose its only underground coal mine.

H.R. 931 offers a narrowly tailored solution. The bill allows mining on a limited section of Federal land to keep the mine running while the Federal review process continues. It does not roll back environmental protections or shortcut oversight. The mine remains subject to State and Federal regulations, and every ton of coal will be mined under the same safety and environmental standards already in place.

This bill is about saving jobs and protecting a community that has done everything by the book. The mine has gone through years of environmental reviews, spent millions to meet regulatory requirements, and made every good faith effort to stay in compliance with Federal law. What it needs now is a clear path to keep operating while the Federal Government finishes its paperwork.

Now, the stakes are high. Mining in the AM3 lease area has already been disrupted. Private coal seams are nearly exhausted, workers are being idled, and there is no backup plan if the mine closes. The region cannot afford to lose this economic driver, and the workers cannot afford to be left waiting on yet another delay.

H.R. 931 has broad local support. It is backed by State leaders and community members who understand just how important this mine is to our part of the country. They know this legislation is the only way to keep the mine operational in the short term. This is a simple solution to a solvable problem.

I urge the Committee to act swiftly to advance this bill. Let's make sure these workers stay on the job, their families stay in their homes, and their communities stay strong.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield the remainder of my time.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields back. I thank the gentleman for his testimony. We will now move to our second panel, which is comprised of one witness.

Let me remind the witness that, under Committee rules, they must limit their oral statements to 5 minutes, but their entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony, please press talk, the talk button on the microphone.

We are using timing lights. In my previous life, I explained the red light system to a lot of people driving across south Mississippi, but today it will be just a little different. So, when using these lights, you will begin with the turn to green. When you have 1 minute remaining the light will turn yellow. At the end of the 5 minutes the light will turn red, and I will ask you to please complete your statement.

Dr. Cruickshank, you are now recognized for 5 minutes for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF WALTER CRUICKSHANK, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ansari, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Comprehensive Offshore Resource Evaluation Act and the Offshore Islands Authorities Act of 2025. The Department has also submitted statements for the record on the other bills you are considering today.

From his first day in office, President Trump has prioritized a revitalization of domestic energy production to stimulate economic growth and strengthen our national security. His executive order, Unleashing American Energy, reaffirms the national interest in maximizing the use of affordable, reliable domestic energy resources. The order establishes a clear policy directive to promote energy exploration and production on Federal lands and waters, including the Outer Continental Shelf, to meet the needs of the American people and solidify U.S. global energy leadership for generations to come.

As the Federal OCS steward, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management plays a central role in implementing this policy. Our mission is to manage the development of the Nation's offshore energy and mineral resources in an economically and environmentally responsible manner.

Offshore energy development is a vital component of U.S. national security, and a critical driver of American prosperity. Offshore activities support hundreds of thousands of jobs and provide a significant share of U.S. energy production. Last month, at the direction of Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum, BOEM issued a request for information and comments, the first step in the development of the 11th National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program. The request for interest marks the beginning of a multiyear process that involves robust public engagement and multiple rounds of detailed analysis for the Secretary to consider while rendering his final program decision.

While we remain committed to completing the three Gulf of America lease sales outlined in the current national OCS program, we are moving forward with developing a new schedule that aligns with the President's directive to maximize the use of OCS energy resources. BOEM conducts a national assessment of undiscovered, technically recoverable resources and undiscovered economically recoverable resources every 5 years. This assessment informs energy policy, including development of the national OCS program, and contributes to the comprehensive inventory reports submitted to Congress. BOEM's most recent assessment, completed in 2021, estimated mean, undiscovered, technically recoverable volumes of almost 69 billion barrels of oil and 229 trillion cubic feet of natural gas across the entire Outer Continental Shelf. Preparations for the 2026 assessment are underway, incorporating the latest geologic, geophysical, and economic data to ensure accuracy and transparency.

The CORE Act of 2025 aims to strengthen U.S. national energy security by modernizing, excuse me, by mandating standardized, recurring assessment and mapping of offshore energy resources. It calls for the modernization and coordination of exploration methodologies, and supports the development of data-driven policies that promote safe, efficient, and responsible resource development.

BOEM welcomes the objectives of the CORE Act and recognizes the value of enhanced interagency coordination and improved transparency in offshore resource evaluation. BOEM would welcome the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee and the bill's sponsor on technical aspects of the bill.

The Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025 seeks to restore access to approximately 625 million acres that prior executive action had withdrawn from energy development.

As drafted, the Act would nullify certain OCS withdrawals put in place by former Presidents Obama and Biden, and subsequently rescinded by President Trump. The Act also places limitations on future withdrawals by placing limits on how much acreage a president can withdraw, limiting the time frame of future withdrawals to no more than 20 years, and ensuring that such decisions are grounded in thorough geological, economic, and national security assessments.

BOEM strongly supports overturning the OCS administrative withdrawals that unnecessarily impede American energy development and generally supports the intent of the Offshore Lands Authorities Act to establish a more predictable framework for offshore resource management to enhance regulatory certainty, encourage investment, and promote long-term planning in offshore energy development.

As BOEM carries out its mission, we remain committed to meeting the high standards of this administration and Congress. Expanding offshore energy capabilities is vital to providing affordable energy for American consumers, creating high-paying jobs and reducing our dependence on foreign adversaries.

On a personal note, I have lost count of the number of times I have sat at this table over the years, but this will likely be my last. It has always been an honor to appear before this Subcommittee and to work with its staff, and I am sincerely grateful for the support the Subcommittee has provided to our various programs to ensure that the Nation's energy and mineral resources are responsibly managed to the benefit of the American people.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Cruickshank follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. WALTER D. CRUICKSHANK, ACTING DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Introduction

Chairman Stauber, Ranking Member Ansari, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss H.R. 2556, Comprehensive Offshore Resource Evaluation (CORE) Act of 2025, and H.R. 513, Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025.

From his first day in office, President Trump has prioritized the revitalization of domestic energy production to stimulate economic growth and strengthen our national security. His Executive Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy, reaffirms the national interest in maximizing the use of affordable, reliable domestic energy resources. The order establishes a clear policy directive: to promote energy exploration and production on federal lands and waters, including the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), to meet the needs of the American people and solidify U.S. global energy leadership for generations to come.

As the federal OCS steward, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) plays a central role in implementing this policy. Our mission is to manage the development of the Nation's offshore energy and mineral resources in an economically and environmentally responsible manner. We achieve this through leasing and plan approval programs for offshore oil, gas, and marine minerals, ensuring that resource development is balanced with environmental stewardship and public engagement.

By expanding access to OCS energy resources, BOEM supports the Administration's goal of strengthening domestic energy security, creating high-quality jobs, and bolstering American energy independence.

Offshore Oil and Gas Development

Offshore energy development is a vital component of U.S. national security and a critical driver of American prosperity. Offshore activities support hundreds of thousands of jobs and provide a significant share of U.S. energy production.

Last month, at the direction of Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum, BOEM issued a Request for Information and Comments (an RFI), the first step in the development of the 11th National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program. The RFI marks the beginning of a multi-year process that involves robust public engagement and multiple rounds of detailed analysis for the Secretary to consider when rendering his final Program decision.

While we remain committed to completing the three Gulf of America lease sales outlined in the current 2024–2029 National OCS Program, we are moving forward with developing a new schedule that aligns with the President's directive to maximize the use of OCS energy resources.

As of May 1, 2025, BOEM manages over 2,200 active offshore oil and gas leases, covering approximately 12 million acres. In Fiscal Year 2024, these leases generated $7 billion in revenue, produced approximately 667.5 million barrels of oil and 700 billion cubic feet of natural gas, accounting for 14% of domestic oil production and 2% of natural gas production—predominantly from the Gulf of America.

National Resource Assessments

BOEM conducts a formal National Assessment of Undiscovered Technically Recoverable Resources (UTRR) and Undiscovered Economically Recoverable Resources (UERR) every five years. This assessment informs energy policy and contributes to the comprehensive inventory reports submitted to Congress.

UTRR estimates reflect undiscovered volumes of oil and gas that could be produced using conventional technologies, while UERR represents the subset considered economically viable under current market and technological conditions.

BOEM's most recent assessment, completed in 2021, estimated a mean UTRR volume of 68.79 billion barrels of oil and 229.03 trillion cubic feet of gas across the entire OCS. Preparations for the 2026 assessment are already underway, incorporating the latest geologic, geophysical, and economic data to ensure accuracy and transparency.

Earlier this year, BOEM announced a significant increase in discovered oil and gas reserves in the Gulf of America OCS. BOEM's updated assessment evaluated over 140 oil and gas fields, identifying 18 new discoveries and analyzing more than 37,000 reservoirs across 1,336 fields in the Gulf. This comprehensive review added 1.30 billion barrels of oil equivalent since 2021, bringing the total discovered reserve estimate to 7.04 billion barrels of oil equivalent. This includes 5.77 billion barrels of oil and 7.15 trillion cubic feet of natural gas—a 22.6% increase in remaining recoverable reserves.

CORE Act of 2025

The Comprehensive Offshore Resource Evaluation Act of 2025 aims to strengthen U.S. national energy security by mandating a standardized recurring assessment and mapping of offshore energy resources. It calls for the modernization and coordination of exploration methodologies and supports the development of data-driven policies that promote safe, efficient, and responsible resource development.

BOEM welcomes the objectives of the CORE Act and recognizes the value of enhanced interagency coordination and improved transparency in offshore resource evaluation. BOEM would welcome the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee and sponsor on technical aspects of the bill.

Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025

The Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025 seeks to restore access to approximately 625 million acres that prior executive actions had withdrawn from energy development. As drafted, the Act would nullify certain OCS withdrawals put in place by former Presidents Obama and Biden and subsequently rescinded by President Trump. The Act also places limitations on future withdrawals by (1) capping any individual withdrawal at 150,000 acres; (2) limiting the timeframe of future withdrawals to no more than 20 years; and (3) ensuring that such decisions are grounded in thorough geological, economic, and national security assessments. The Act would also limit each President to no more than a cumulative 500,000 acres of total withdrawals without obtaining Congressional approval.

BOEM strongly supports overturning the OCS administrative withdrawals that unnecessarily impede American energy development, and generally supports the intent of the Offshore Lands Authorities Act to establish a more predictable framework for offshore resource management to enhance regulatory certainty, encourage investment, and promote long-term planning in offshore energy development.

Conclusion

As BOEM carries out its mission, we remain committed to meeting the high standards of this Administration and Congress. Expanding offshore energy capabilities is vital to providing affordable energy for American consumers, creating high-paying jobs, and reducing our dependence on foreign adversaries.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HON. DANIEL WEBSTER TO DR. WALTER CRUICKSHANK, ACTING DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Dr. Walter Cruickshank did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Question 1. Florida's first offshore pipeline—more than 580 miles long, including 431 miles underwater—delivers up to 1.1 billion cubic feet of clean-burning natural gas every day, enough to power 4.5 million homes. It was built by 2,500 workers over the course of a year and is a major backbone of our state's energy reliability. Given that a majority of this supply comes from offshore production in the central and western Gulf, don't you think it's critical that we maintain accurate and science-based assessments of those offshore resources, as required in the CORE Act, to ensure Florida's continued access to affordable and reliable energy?

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HON. SARAH ELFRETH TO DR. WALTER CRUICKSHANK, ACTING DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Dr. Walter Cruickshank did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Question 1. The Department of Defense published a report in 2015 entitled DoD Mission Compatibility Planning Assessment: BOEM 2017–2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program. Has BOEM received an updated *report from the Department of Defense on offshore leasing related to military installations? If so, please attach a copy.*

Question 2. BOEM and the Department of the Defense operate under a Memorandum of Understanding on waters adjacent to military installations. What is the status of the most recent MOU?

Question 3. In this current planning cycle, what is the timeline for engagement with the Department of the Defense?

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HON. YASSAMIN ANSARI TO DR. WALTER CRUICKSHANK, ACTING DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Dr. Walter Cruickshank did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Question 1. Dr. Cruickshank, in response to my question during the hearing for an update on how many staff at the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management have taken the buyout or early retirement offers, you responded "in the neighborhood of 100 people". Could you please provide a more detailed response on the number of people who have taken the buyout, early retirement offers, or been fired at BOEM since the beginning of this administration? What proportion of total BOEM staff does that comprise? What program functions did these staff cover? Are there plans to backfill these vacancies and if so, which ones?

Question 2. In response to my question about your engagement with DOGE employees, you responded that your engagement was largely focused on contracts and which contracts should be terminated and which should be continued. Who had the final decision-making authority on contract continuation, BOEM or DOGE? Can you provide a more detailed description of the process for deciding which contracts to terminate, a full list of the terminated contracts, and the provided justification for termination?

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HON. JARED HUFFMAN TO DR. WALTER CRUICKSHANK, ACTING DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Dr. Walter Cruickshank did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Question 1. President Trump's January 20th memorandum, "Temporary Withdrawal of All Areas on the Outer Continental Shelf from Offshore Wind Leasing and Review of the Federal Government's Leasing and Permitting Practices for Wind Projects," (90 FR 8363) claims "various alleged legal deficiencies underlying the Federal Government's leasing and permitting of onshore and offshore wind projects" and "potential inadequacies in various environmental reviews required by the National Environmental Policy Act to lease or permit wind projects". Please identify the alleged legal deficiencies and potential inadequacies in environmental reviews.

Question 2. The review of the offshore wind leasing and permitting process initiated by this memorandum has been underway for over four months with no substantive updates. How is BOEM proceeding with this review, what is the agency considering in its review, and what is the expected timeline for completion?

Mr. EZELL. Thank you sir and thank you for your service to this country. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, for his 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate your assessment.

Doctor, would you mind just speaking to what the, respectful of inquiries from across the aisle and sort of the narrative of opening up leasing, one of the common refrains that we address at town halls and et cetera is that, what about the claim that some leases remain unused?

And I have to clarify regarding the inconsistency and that the withdrawal of lands had created, and the requirement for reliable commitment and contractually with exploration and potential extraction, there is time and money involved here, and it is not easy to move forward with a lease if there is no stability in the considered areas.

And so, the investment to explore, identify, and extract requires a stable leasing environment. And from your position, I realize you would be limited perhaps in how you can speak to this, but I would like you to address that, the difference between where we were and where we are going with the stability of offshore leasing and what it would mean to the American energy industry and therefore to the American economy.

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Yes, sir, I will start by saying that the information on leases we make available identifies the number of leases that have been issued and the numbers that are producing. That does not mean the non-producing leases do not have activity on them. There is a great deal of work that goes into bringing a lease to the point where it can produce in terms of exploring what is underneath the seabed; understanding what is on the seabed, as well; drilling wells to determine if there is anything underground; and additional wells to fully delineate any discovery. And only then beginning to design what a development project may look like. So, it can take 5 to 10 or more years to bring a lease into production.

And so many of the non-producing leases actually have quite a lot of activity on them, and others are part of companies' portfolios that would allow them to act based on new information and new technologies as they become available.

To compare where we were to where we are, we are currently implementing the 5-year leasing program of the previous administration that called for three lease sales in the Gulf of America across 5 years. The President has made it clear that he does not believe that is a sufficient number of lease sales, and we have started the process to develop a new schedule of oil and gas leasing.

I cannot say at this time how many lease sales will be in that program. That is something that will be determined over the course of the process. But we are undergoing the process now to put together a new schedule.

Mr. HIGGINS. It is a fascinating business to, when you really study what is required by the industry to explore and identify fields, and then to prepare for extraction, and then extraction and transport, it takes a lot to move our energy product from the, you know, far below the surface of the of ocean floor to a reliable and clean and affordable and abundant product in our homes and in our vehicles. And the stability of the leasing environment is crucial for that journey to begin.

And I would ask you to just comment, because of your background, you know people in the industry. And what is the level of confidence now, since January, and with the enactment of bills like my bill, H.R. 513, to restabilize and to secure the leasing environment? What is the level of optimism in the American energy industry?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. I believe the oil and gas industry is optimistic. They have been very much engaged with us since January in sharing their opinions of things they think ought to be done, and providing their input, and really saying that they are pleased about the direction things seem to be headed.

Mr. HIGGINS. I concur, Doctor.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My time has expired. I thank you again for allowing me to waive on, and I yield.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Pallone, for his 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. PALLONE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank the Ranking Member also for inviting me to participate today.

I should say that I served on this Committee for almost 30 years, and I looked around at the name plates. I don't think anybody was on the Committee when I started in 1988, so it is nice to be back.

But today's hearing on H.R. 513, the Offshore Lands Authorities Act, is of critical importance to my district at the Jersey Shore. You see, the waters off New Jersey and all the Atlantic states from Florida to Maine are protected from oil and gas drilling right now. And this happened because both Presidents Trump and Biden recognized the vital importance of the East Coast's existing economy to the well-being of Americans nationwide. And the Atlantic coast relies on a clean and thriving marine environment. It is basically the foundation for major industry and for small businesses in our State, and the Atlantic coast beaches and bays are where we take our families to recreate and relax. We are obviously looking forward to Memorial Day weekend.

But the Jersey Shore's economy and way of life depends on a clean environment, but that is not just New Jersey. In every East Coast State residents have agreed that offshore oil and gas development does not belong on the Atlantic coast. And we saw what happened years ago with the BP oil spill, where the Gulf Coast tourism was really destroyed for a long time, and the spill actually went all the way around the Florida's East Coast.

And at the end of his first term, President Trump used the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Authority Act to protect Florida to North Carolina from oil and gas development. I think that was a good thing. But one oil spill, even in North Carolina, would destroy New Jersey's fishing and tourism industry. So, President Biden went even further, and protected the Atlantic. And again, this was a good thing.

The problem is that H.R. 513 revokes all the withdrawals ordered by Presidents Biden and Obama, even though it leaves in place the withdrawal from North Carolina to Florida that was ordered by President Trump. And of course, I oppose it, because right now, all of the Atlantic coast is closed to offshore oil and gas drilling. So, I wanted to ask the director, really, two questions.

And you can answer them together separately if you like, sir. In the recently posted 5-year oil and gas leasing plan documents shared with the public by BOEM, it calls for new seismic surveys in the Atlantic. So, Dr. Cruickshank, wanted to ask two questions.

Is the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management planning to issue permits for seismic testing for offshore oil and gas in the Atlantic, which, of course, I oppose?

And then second, can you commit that the Bureau will not include offshore oil and gas lease sales in the Atlantic in the next 5-year plan?

Those are my two questions.

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Thank you, Congressman, and I have been at this table while you were a member of the Committee, so I remember conversing with you before.

But at the current time we have no permits before us seeking to do seismic activity in the Atlantic. And if at any time we receive such a permit, we would review it under our standard practices. But there is nothing pending right now.

With respect to future lease sales, we are just starting the process of getting public input on the development of a new program. There is a lot of work to go before the Secretary even proposes his first schedule of possible lease sales. And there will be three set schedules put out before a program is finalized. So, it is far too premature to be able to talk about what may be in or not in the next program.

Mr. PALLONE. Well, I guess what I don't understand, I am going to ask you a third question now, is if right now the law says there is no offshore oil and gas leasing permitted on the Atlantic coast, why would you even entertain, if someone came forth asking for a permit for seismic testing or to do offshore oil and gas sales lease, why would you even entertain that, given that the current law says that those are not allowed?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Under the OCS Lands Act, when we start the process we provide the Secretary information on every planning area, regardless of its current legal status, so that he can do the balancing that is called for under that act in coming up with his proposals.

We also know that the status of any particular area can change. Obviously, we would not hold a lease sale in an area where the law says we cannot do so, but the Secretary has the ability to consider the potential of areas just in case the legal standing of areas changes over time.

Mr. PALLONE. Well, my time is almost up, Mr. Chairman, but I just want to say again that the possibility of either seismic testing or the drilling is extremely alarming to me, and I know to my constituents, and we would obviously oppose it.

So, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes.

After the past few months, the United States is finally seeing positive change to unleashing our country's energy production. From the harmful Biden EOs we are overturning and new policies coming out of the Trump administration through today's hearing, jobs are being restored, businesses are beginning to thrive again, and we are on track to energy independence once again. Our Nation will no longer be dependent on foreign adversaries for our everyday necessities.

Dr. Cruickshank, you state in your testimony that 1.3 billion barrels of oil have been added after realizing new reserves across fields in the Gulf of America. How is it from 2021 to 2025 the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, BOEM, added 1.3 billion barrels of oil equivalent, but from 2016 to 2021 reports issued under Biden that BOEM seems to have lost 18 billion barrels and 86 trillion cubic feet of gas?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Mr. Chairman, the two numbers are a little bit like comparing apples to oranges.

VOICE. Turn your mic on.

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. The increase of the, I am sorry, Mr. Chairman, it is a little bit like comparing apples and oranges, the two sets of numbers. The first numbers you were talking about talked about the proven reserves, the amount of oil that had actually been discovered over time, and we took a look at the various new discoveries across the Gulf of Mexico in particular and found that those discoveries had proven 1.3 billion barrels of oil equivalent since 2021. But that is based on the actual drilling results and discoveries.

The other number you were talking about was an estimate of undiscovered resources, things that had yet to be found. The last national assessment that was done of undiscovered resources took a look at all the latest information, and was smaller than the one before, in part because of discoveries that moved things from the undiscovered bucket to the discovered bucket, but in part also because there were a lot of disappointing exploration results in the 5 years since the previous assessment which caused our geologists and experts to think some of the plays may not be as prolific as they had previously estimated.

But recognize those estimates are a snapshot in time. As we get more information from additional drilling, as new technologies become available that make more things technically recoverable that may not be now, those numbers can change a great deal. And as an example of that, I will note that when I first started out there was nothing in more than about 400 meters of water considered technically recoverable. But we now know that much deeper waters are the source of the majority of production in the Gulf of America.

Mr. EZELL. In four years, you found 1.3 billion barrels of oil equivalent from recoverable reserves. But in 5 years of Democrat-led reports, BOEM lost 14.8 trillion barrels of oil equivalent. Are you telling me that 14 billion barrels of oil were produced from 2016 to 2021?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. No, sir. That is simply a reduction in our estimate of what remained to be discovered on the OCS. There were bits of it that were discovered, but more of it had to do with the disappointing exploration results and some of the plays, leading archeologists to estimate that they had less potential than they previously thought.

Mr. EZELL. Did the hydrocarbon seep out of the ocean floor?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. There are natural seeps in the ocean, but that has nothing to do with the estimates that were made.

Mr. EZELL. My main question is can political appointees provide input in these report's findings before they are published?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Generally, no, that does not occur.

Mr. EZELL. Could a Biden administration official have said, let's take the lowest estimate possible and make that our number?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. We received no such input. Our experts put together a range, and the number that you were quoting was the mean of that range of estimates.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you very much.

Ms. Elfreth, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to start by agreeing with many of the concerns addressed by my colleague from New Jersey, particularly as we talk about seismic testing and offshore drilling, the potential, very real potential, for environmental harm, based on what we know happened in the Gulf of Mexico.

I also want to just say that neither of these two bills would guarantee that any of the oil and gas produced from this offshore drilling would actually benefit the energy or the pocketbooks of my constituents.

But I want to hone in here, Mr. Cruickshank, on a very real national security threat I view that these bills pose. First, though, I do want to thank you for being here and thank you for your decades-long career in public service. And I hope this might be the last time I see you, but I thank you for, an early congratulations on your retirement.

But during this Committee's reconciliation markup just a few weeks ago I offered an amendment that would ensure any offshore oil and gas leases were not offered in areas designated by the Department of Defense as an impediment to military readiness and national security. And it is pretty simple why. Even if everything on a drilling site goes according to plan, the mere presence of these rigs and the pollution they produce could cause immediate threats to our service members, and that is just not a risk I am willing to take.

Mr. Cruickshank, in 2015 the Department of Defense issued a report entitled, "DOD Mission Compatibility Planning Assessment in BOEM 2017 to 2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program."

Mr. Chair, I would like to submit a copy of this report for the record.

Mr. EZELL. Without objection.

[The report follows:]

DoD Mission Compatibility Planning Assessment:
BOEM 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS)
Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program

30 October 2015

Prepared by:

Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations and Environment
Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD016.pdf

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you.

In this report the DOD analyzed offshore lease blocks, analyzed each block's role in activities critical for military readiness and national security, and determined what, if any, level of drilling activity can be done without impeding their work. Mr. Cruickshank, are you familiar with the report I just referenced?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. I did see it at the time. I don't remember the details.

Ms. ELFRETH. OK. Well, I am happy to dig in here. Our military relies on obviously accessible and unimpeded waterways to conduct military exercises and, again, if needed, defend our country from attack. So, Mr. Cruickshank, is Interior or BOEM implementing any of the recommendations from this report?

I know you are kind of familiar, but in the recent work have you been matching these or implementing the recommendations from this report into what you are working on right now?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. What we do at the start of the development of any 5-year program is we reach out to the Department of Defense and get their input as it exists today, because from year to year their needs change and their requirements change. So, we will work closely with them in understanding what areas are of concern to them.

Ms. ELFRETH. Have you heard from them in this recent go-round?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. No. Right now, we just have our first round of public comment out. But before we publish any sort of schedule, we will be getting input from them.

Ms. ELFRETH. OK. Mr. Chair, just again for the record, I have areas under consideration from BOEM's website and there is no current mention of military defense or even input from the Navy. Could I submit this for the record, please?

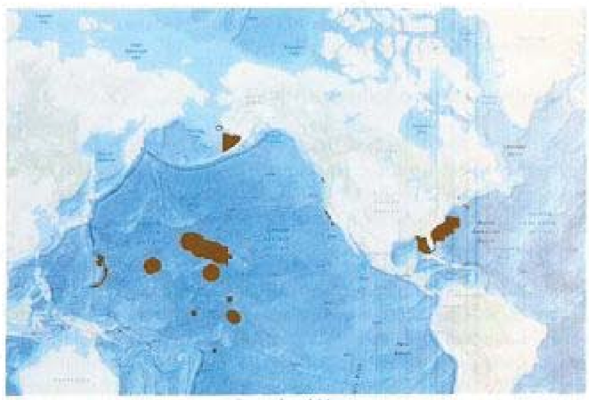
Mr. EZELL. Without objection.

[The report follows:]

HOME | LEASING

Areas Under Restriction

OCS Withdrawals Explorer
(interactive map)



Download Maps

Areas Under Restriction for Oil and Gas Leasing

I. Presidential Withdrawals

Under section 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, 43 U.S.C. §1341, the President of the United States may, from time to time, withdraw from disposition any of the unleased lands of the Outer Continental Shelf.

- **Alaska Presidential Withdrawals:**

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The full document is available for viewing at:

/https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD015.pdf

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you.

Due to the necessary and sensitive work of military installations, all the blocks, as I mentioned, that overlay east and west coasts are classified by DOD in this report, are either requiring total prohibition or very specific conditions for those leasings. Mr. Cruickshank, does Interior or BOEM intend to follow the recommendations from the 2015 study?

Or, if you do get new recommendations based on this current DOD, what is the plan to follow those recommendations?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. We will work with the Department of Defense to understand what the requirements are now, to understand what areas are truly incompatible and what is going to be, and which can be addressed through mitigation, and we will work with them to put forward a proposal for public consideration.

Ms. ELFRETH. OK. I would like to request, Mr. Chair, that Mr. Cruickshank keep us, this Subcommittee, involved in those discussions as they can move forward, either in writing or in person.

Mr. EZELL. Yes.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you very much. OK.

So again, just, this is of deep concern for all the reasons I mentioned, but this needs to be a priority for this administration. Again, we cannot sacrifice our national security or our readiness for offshore drilling that, again, poses other challenges. It is my sincere hope that the administration will implement either the 2015 plan, which I think is very thoroughly executed, or any updates to that plan that, again, meet our critical need for readiness.

And with that, Mr. Chair, I will yield back.

Mr. STAUBER [presiding]. OK, I will yield to Representative Hurd 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. HURD. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Cruickshank, good afternoon. H.R. 2556 would require BOEM to modernize its offshore resource assessments by using AI and seismic surveys and other advanced tools not only to better estimate energy and critical mineral resources, but also to project the economic benefits of development like job creation and Federal or State revenues. Outdated models risk under-estimating resources, which could lead to less interest in lease sales in these areas and discourage investment in the United States.

Can you talk to us about how the CORE Act's requirement for peer-reviewed modern analyses help quantify the full economic value of offshore development, particularly in terms of GDP, job creation, and billions in potential State and Federal revenue?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. I believe what the peer-reviewed, the CORE Act called for is over the geologic modeling itself in coming up with the estimates, and that is something we are accustomed to doing. We have gone to the Society of Petroleum Engineers before to have their expert committees peer review our methodologies for coming up with those resource estimates.

The models that we use then to estimate economic benefits that may come from development of those resources are made publicly available, usually through the development of the 5-year program, and we receive comments from across the board on those.

Mr. HURD. Could this lead to more targeted and economically strategic leasing decisions?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Better information can always assist us in making better decisions.

Mr. HURD. OK. And in what areas, geographic or technological, do you see the greatest potential for unlocking resources?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Well, right now, if you look at where we have estimated the undiscovered resources to be, the majority are in the Gulf of America or offshore Alaska.

Mr. HURD. And can you think of any new strategies that BOEM could use to unlock untapped offshore assets and strengthen America's position in global markets?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Generally, the main tool at our disposal is to make areas available for the private industry to explore.

Mr. HURD. OK. Thank you very much for your testimony today, and congratulations on this being your final hearing.

So, with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much. The Chair now recognizes Representative Rivas from California's 29th district.

You are recognized for 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. RIVAS. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for recognizing me.

As we saw during our reconciliation markup, my Republican colleagues and President Trump are pushing for at least 30 offshore oil and gas lease sales over the next 15 years, and 6 lease sales off the coast of Alaska. They are ripping away sorely-needed funding to agencies like BOEM and NOAA which provide resources and research for our local economies and ensure our environment is protected for all. They are stripping away the ability of judicial review and key provisions of NEPA that give underserved communities a voice. They are even mandating a protest filing fee if any member from these communities has an issue with their projects.

These efforts are just some of many meant to dirty our water, pollute our air, and silence our communities. I think about what this means for frontline environmental justice communities like mine in the San Fernando Valley, those in the Central Valley of California, and in Cancer Alley on the Gulf Coast. Can you commit to ensuring comprehensive community consultation on the oil and gas leases that BOEM will oversee. Yes, or no?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Yes, the program development process really requires robust public participation throughout. There are three different periods where we get public input on what we should be looking at and what we should be analyzing, and we take those comments very seriously.

Ms. RIVAS. So, you are saying that there will continue to be community input in environmental justice communities around these leases, oil and gas leases.

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. All of the public, all communities are welcome to participate as we develop the next program.

Ms. RIVAS. OK. You know, I think that, for decades, these communities have been burdened with these hazardous industries, with high cancer and asthma rates. I think it is very important to continue to allow the communities to speak out and not shorten this process in any way, or for there to be a way to get out of it like I felt was happening during our markup in the bill. And, you know, I just want to make sure that, you know, we take these communities' input into consideration on these issues.

So, I yield back.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much. I will now recognize our Ranking Member, Representative Ansari, for 5 minutes.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you.

Dr. Cruickshank, I would like to ask about some extremely concerning reports out of the Gulf about a recent major oil spill. According to CBS news a leak was first reported as a "well blowout," with witnesses later describing a geyser of oil shooting 30 to 40 feet into the air. The same reporting raises serious concerns about how DOGE cuts could hurt oil spill response. We have one of these former NOAA staff members from the Emergency Response Division here today to testify on the next panel.

Since the beginning of this year, reporting has found that around 2,000 employees from NOAA have been laid off or taken early retirement, including members of the team who directly respond to oil spills. Beyond NOAA, I am extremely concerned with the huge numbers of staff at the Department of the Interior who have taken the deferred resignation program, and reports that Tyler Hassen, a former oil field services executive and member of DOGE, is managing plans to conduct these large-scale layoffs. These are staff that run essential programs and services like offshore oil and gas safety inspections and enforcement for incidents like this most recent spill and others like the USGS Hazards Program, which we are looking to reauthorize on a bipartisan basis here today that protect communities from landslides, earthquakes, and volcanoes.

Mr. Cruickshank, I want to make clear that I am grateful to career staff like you who have served to carry out the goals of the president, regardless of who that president may be. You carried out the objectives of President Biden, and now you are carrying out the work and objectives of President Trump. With that in mind, I would like to ask a few questions.

In addition to your role as Acting Director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, you served as Acting Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management from February 28 to April 10. In this role, in addition to BOEM, you oversaw the Bureau of Land Management, the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, and, importantly, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement. Dr. Cruickshank, did you engage with any DOGE employees during your time as Assistant Secretary or in your current role as Acting Director of BOEM, and can you briefly describe your engagement?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Yes, my engagement was largely in terms of representing BOEM in talking with them. And during the period that you mentioned, the focus was really on contracts at that point, and what contracts should be terminated, and which ones should be continued.

Ms. ANSARI. And can you please provide us with an update on how many staff at the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management have taken buyout or early retirement offers?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. We don't have a final number on that yet, but it is in the neighborhood of 100 people.

Ms. ANSARI. And how many employees took the buyout, early retirement, or were fired at the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement while you oversaw the department from February 28 to April 10?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. I do not know the numbers for BSEE. Those numbers really would have been revealed after I was no longer Acting Assistant Secretary.

Ms. ANSARI. OK. And Dr. Cruickshank, can you confirm that no staff responsible for essential services like offshore safety and enforcement will be laid off as part of the agency's reduction in force?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. I have not seen the workplace efficiency plan as yet. As you know, there is a temporary restraining order that has kept that from being circulated within the department. So, I don't know what is in that, but I know that the department has as a priority making sure that operations offshore are done safely, and making sure there is an adequate workforce to be able to do that.

Ms. ANSARI. Dr. Cruickshank, I just want to say I really appreciate your career service, and I appreciate each of the career employees who have taken early retirement or the buyout or who have been unfairly fired. I understand, Dr. Cruickshank, that you are an institutionalist, and are probably personally just as alarmed as I am that 24-year-old DOGE employees are gutting your department. We should all be alarmed by what this administration is doing to undercut Federal service, and there will be a time when we have to rebuild BOEM after this, and it will be significantly harder because you are not there.

I also, you know, across both sides of the aisle I think we can all agree that electricity demand is growing. According to a recent S&P global report, U.S. electricity and demand is expected to surge up to 50 percent by 2040 due to the growth of data centers, new manufacturing, and electric trends. Regardless of how you feel about any one kind of energy production or another, offshore wind, which your department oversees, will be one of the fastest ways to meet this demand.

Really, but there are multiple other projects in limbo, projects that have invested significantly in the U.S. and have meaningful energy generation potential. Why would we slow down these domestic energy projects if the U.S. cannot afford to wait for energy security?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. So, I think that our task is both to try and move forward with energy development, but also to do so in an environmentally responsible way. That is what our statutes call for. And it is the responsibility of the Secretary of the Interior to take a look at his programs. And if he sees information that suggests that some things may be out of line with what the laws call for, that it is OK to take a pause and take a look and make sure that everything is as it should be before letting them continue.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you.

Mr. STAUBER. All right. Thank you very much.

Dr. Cruickshank, I think you had mentioned that this is your last hearing. I am actually privileged to be the last person to have a conversation with you officially.

First off, I do want to recognize your professional career as a, 40-plus years in the Interior. I will tell you that you came to one of the committees, and I was asking you some questions, and I had done my homework. You supported what President Trump was doing, 45, and then supporting what President Biden wanted done. They were philosophically different. And when I asked you why you, why change, and you said you were just following the leadership from the elected people, what the elected president wanted. It actually shocked me in a good way, that you weren't putting your own opinions, you were following what you were asked to do in a professional and a safe manner.

And I think, as you leave your 40 years, I think there is many, many people not only in Congress but the people that you have worked with, you have left something and you instilled in something that is so valuable as an employee, a professional employee within our government and Interior and your knowledge, and I just want to say thank you for what you did. And I wish you the best in retirement. You, of course, being questioned so many times by Members of Congress, you have earned it. And so, I will end up with just some of my questions here.

The section 12(a) OCSLA was never intended to permanently lock away offshore resources, yet presidential withdrawals have attempted indefinite bans on hundreds of millions of acres and regions containing known oil and gas resources without regard for future needs or technology. H.R. 513 would limit the size and duration of withdrawals and require economic energy and security impact assessments before a future withdrawal moves forward.

In your view, how could permanent closures impact future generations in terms of lost revenue, energy security, and technological opportunities?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Well, you know, depending on what areas are put aside and the reasons they are put aside for, clearly if you are permanently withdrawing high resource potential areas from leasing and development, then you are foregoing a lot of potential investment, a lot of potential income.

Mr. STAUBER. For the future.

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Yes.

Mr. STAUBER. And do you believe requiring an updated resource assessment before withdrawal as the bill proposes better balances conservation with future access?

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Yes, I think that mandating what has generally been the practice where we provide a lot of information on what we know about an area is important for making sound decisions.

Mr. STAUBER. I can't stress enough how important I believe this part of the legislation is, the requirement for an economic and resource assessment to be completed prior to a withdrawal. If an administration is going to take steps to institute withdrawal, the American people deserve to have a full understanding of its impact.

And in my opening statement, I mentioned that the former Secretary of the Interior, Secretary Haaland, had no idea when she banned mining in 225,000 acres of the biggest untapped copper nickel find in the world in the district that I am privileged to represent, Minnesota's 8th congressional district, the Duluth

Complex, in a Senate hearing, she said she had no idea there were critical minerals in there. I think it was so irresponsible for her to do that when we need those critical minerals. Again, the biggest untapped copper nickel find in the world, the Duluth Complex in northeastern Minnesota.

We need those critical minerals. We can lead the world not only in oil and gas extraction, but critical minerals and so much more, and I am really looking forward to having this piece of legislation not only pass this Committee, but get signed into law. It is good for the American people, and it is good stewardship of our oceans and our lands.

So, with that, Mr. Cruickshank, I am done questioning. I will give you, this normally doesn't happen, but I will give you 30 seconds to wrap up, maybe a minute to wrap up your career.

[Laughter.]

Dr. CRUICKSHANK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that opportunity. And I appreciate the kind words that you and others of the Committee have had. It is, 40 years is a long time to be working in one building, but it is, I believe in the mission of the department, I believe in the mission of BOEM, all parts of that mission. And it has really been a pleasure for me to work with this Subcommittee over the years to try and make sure that we continue to improve upon what we do. So, I appreciate all the support that the Subcommittee has given us over those years. Thank you.

Mr. STAUBER. Well said. Thank you.

If there are no further questions, we will now move on to, no, I have got to find where I am here. OK. If there are no further questions, we will now move on to the third panel. I would like to thank the witness for his valuable testimony.

You are now dismissed. While the clerk resets our witness table, I will remind the witness that under Committee rules, they must limit their oral statements to 5 minutes, but their entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

I would also like to remind our witnesses of the timing lights which will turn red at the end of your 5-minute statement, and to please remember to turn on your microphones.

As with the second panel, I will allow all witnesses to testify before the member questioning.

[Pause.]

Mr. STAUBER. Our first witness is Mr. Parker Phipps, and he is the President and CEO of Signal Peak Energy. And he is stationed in Roundup, Montana.

Mr. Phipps, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF PARKER PHIPPS, PRESIDENT AND CEO, SIGNAL PEAK ENERGY, ROUNDUP, MONTANA

Mr. PHIPPS. Good afternoon, Chairman Stauber and members of the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 931, the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification bill.

I also want to thank Representative Downing for introducing H.R. 931. We are excited to have him as the Congressman for the people of eastern Montana.

I would also like to thank my wife, who joined me for her first trip to Washington, D.C.

I am the CEO of Signal Peak Energy, the operator of the Bull Mountains mine outside of Roundup, Montana. The Bull Mountains mine contains a very high BTU, low sulfur coal, and coal mining has occurred in the Bull Mountains for nearly 150 years. The Bull Mountains Mine is an underground coal mine which utilizes modern longwall mining techniques.

Like much of the western U.S., the surface and subsurface of the Bull Mountains is a combination of Federal, private, and State ownership. Signal Peak applied to lease 2,700 acres of Federal coal in 2008 and, after completion of an environmental assessment, entered into a lease with the United States in 2011 to develop the Federal coal. Under the lease we pay an 8 percent royalty, with half of the Federal royalty going to the State of Montana. In 2022, the last year Signal Peak was allowed to mine Federal coal, we paid $31 million in Federal royalties. In 2023, we paid more than $93 million in State and local taxes in Montana.

We currently employ 250 hard-working Montanans spread out over 17 rural towns.

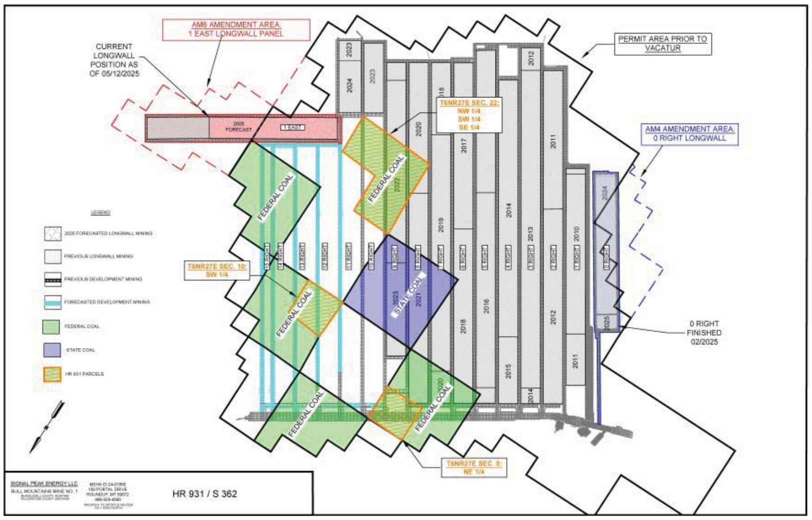
Mining at the Bull Mountains mine is under a State-approved permit issued by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. Montana has the delegated authority to administer the Federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act. Because we mine federally owned coal, our mine plan is reviewed by the Office of Surface Mining at the Department of the Interior. As noted in my written testimony, Signal Peak has spent over 13 years seeking approval to mine this leased coal. During that time OSM has completed three environmental assessments while Signal Peak continued producing coal from private, State, and at times Federal reserves.

Litigation has been continuous for over a decade since Signal Peak began mining coal in 2015. Over the years, the courts have found fault with just two aspects of the thorough environmental review, and until 2023 Signal Peak was able to continue to mine Federal coal as OSM worked to fix the NEPA analysis.

That all changed in February 2023, when the court again remanded the EA back to OSM for the fourth time, but this time the court prohibited Signal Peak from mining any Federal coal until OSM completed yet another NEPA analysis. OSM told the court in December 2022 that its fourth NEPA analysis on the Signal Peak mine plan would be an environmental impact statement. OSM's initial schedule had the issuance of the final EIS by July 2024.

Unfortunately, OSM has missed its own deadlines and kept delaying the process. They have demanded extra studies that neither the court nor Montana DEQ found necessary. Signal Peak has spent over 3 million in the last 2 years, and is still waiting for our EIS. The delay in finalizing the EIS has created a serious problem for the mine.

Signal Peak relies on longwall mining because the coal is a mix of Federal, State, and private ownership, being unable to access the Federal portions effectively blocks mining in the AM–3 permit area.



Mr. PHIPPS. Initially, when we thought the EIS would be complete last summer, Signal Peak modified our mine plan. First, as shown on the map, we mined the start of two longwall panels, panels 10 and 11. You will note that these longwall panels are a quarter mile wide, and as soon as we bumped into Federal coal, we stopped mining.

Second, as shown on the far right and the top left of the map, we worked with the State to get approval to mine two areas of private coal at the edge of our mine. Our efforts, which have cost over $70 million in additional operating expenses, have allowed our employees to continue working. However, without some type of authorization to resume mining in the main area of the mine, those efforts won't be enough and we will begin winding down our operations in the coming months. That is where H.R. 931 comes into play.

As shown by the orange-hashed areas on the map, H.R. 931 would allow Signal Peak to return to the main area of the mine, and mine specific Federal coal until OSM completes the EIS. This mining would proceed according to the current mine plan approved by Montana DEQ and previously by OSM. H.R. 931 would allow us to mine a small portion of the leased Federal coal to keep our mine open. If H.R. 931 is enacted, Signal Peak will have sufficient coal for the next 18 months of production to provide our workforce with the certainty needed to continue this complex mining process.

Thank you for your time today and interest in the Bull Mountains mine. I am more than happy to answer any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Phipps follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PARKER PHIPPS, PRESIDENT & CEO, SIGNAL PEAK ENERGY LLC

Good afternoon, Chairman Stauber and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 931, the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification bill introduced by Representative Downing and Representative

Zinke. As President and CEO of Signal Peak Energy, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 931.

Background

Signal Peak Energy (SPE) owns and operates the Bull Mountains No. 1 Mine ("Mine"), the only underground coal mine in the State of Montana located approximately 15 miles southeast of Roundup, Montana in Musselshell and Yellowstone Counties, Montana. Coal mining began in the Bull Mountains in the early 1880s and has proceeded, relatively continuously, in various parts of the Bull Mountains since then.

The Mine uses long-wall mining and continuous mining techniques to safely and efficiently extract coal from the Mammoth coal seam. Continuous mining techniques are used to prepare access for long-wall mining. Long-wall mining shears coal from the face of rectangular panels approximately 1250 feet wide, advancing from one end to the other of the planned panel. Coal produced from the Mine is sold on the open international market. Since 2015, SPE has mined a checkerboard of private, state and federal coal and has produced over 70 million tons of high-BTU coal.

The Bull Mountains Mine plays a crucial role in the economy of southcentral Montana. It currently employs over 250 workers (down from a peak of 320 workers in 2024). In 2023, SPE paid over $93 million in local and state taxes with $34 million of this total going to kindergarten through grade 12 public education. In 2022, the last full year in which SPE was allowed to mine federal coal, it paid $31.1 million in federal royalties of which $15.6 million went to the State of Montana.

In addition to its economic contributions, Signal Peak Energy is also engrained into the fabric of the community. SPE has provided approximately $400,000 each year to the Signal Peak Community Foundation to support local nonprofits, with contributions totaling over $4.5 million over the last 15 years. These funds have been used to purchase fire trucks and emergency vehicles in Roundup; construct baseball fields; renovate the Old Central School to house the Senior Center; and operate a food bank and a thrift store for Roundup's most vulnerable residents.

SPE has also established a million-dollar endowment that provides scholarships for graduates of Musselshell County high schools to pursue post-secondary education: a $10,000 annual scholarship for a student pursuing an engineering degree, a $5,000 scholarship for a student in trade school, and a $1,000 scholarship for any secondary education. These scholarships are invaluable to educating the next generation who, the community hopes, will choose to stay and raise their families in Musselshell County. Most recently, in 2024 SPE provided a $6 million grant to the Yellowstone Ice Foundation to construct a state-of-the-art ice arena in Billings.

Litigation

In 2008, Signal Peak applied to lease approximately 2,679.9 acres of federal coal at Bull Mountains. In 2011, after the preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) under the National Environmental Policy Act, SPE entered into a coal lease with the United States. This environmental review and coal lease were challenged by environmental groups and upheld by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in 2018.

In 2012, Signal Peak applied to mine coal in an area of the Mine referred to as AM–3. Like most of eastern Montana, the coal in AM–3 is a mix of federal, state, and private coal oriented in a checkerboard pattern that is impossible to safely and economically mine without access to all the coal. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) approved AM–3 in 2013. The Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation Enforcement (OSMRE) within the Department of the Interior (DOI) then prepared an Environmental Assessment on the mining of federal coal in AM–3. In 2015, the Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management approved the mine plan modification allowing the mining of the federal coal in AM–3. Mining commenced shortly thereafter and continued through federal, private, and State coal under the checkerboard mineral ownership until the sudden vacatur order in February 2023, as noted below.

The approval of AM–3 was challenged by environmental groups and, in 2017, the Montana District Court remanded the 2015 EA back to OSMRE for additional environmental analysis of rail transportation and greenhouse gas emissions issues. Mining in AM–3 continued during this time.

In 2018, OSM issued a second Environmental Assessment regarding SPE's request to mine federal coal in AM–3. The Assistant Secretary of Land and Minerals Management again approved SPE's request to mine the leased federal coal in AM–3.

This second approval of AM–3 was again challenged by environmental groups. And, in 2020 (as in 2018), the Montana District Court remanded the 2018 EA back to OSMRE for additional environmental analysis on a single issue related to rail transportation of the coal. Mining in AM–3 continued during this time.

In 2020, OSMRE prepared a third Environmental Assessment completing additional analysis of rail transportation. Once again, the Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management approved SPE's request to mine the leased federal coal in AM–3.

Meanwhile, the environmental groups appealed from the limited remand in their challenge to the 2018 Environmental Assessment to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. In 2022, the Ninth Circuit overruled the Montana District Court and concluded that OSMRE had not adequately considered the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions or explained why those impacts would not be significant, and required that Signal Peak prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

At a remedy hearing on remand to the Montana District Court, OSMRE informed the court that it would prepare an EIS on the AM–3 mine plan. At the hearing, OSMRE represented that the EIS would be finished in 17 months (July 2024) and it would take three additional months to issue a final decision (October 2024).

In February 2023, the Montana District Court ordered OSMRE to prepare an EIS on AM–3. Significantly, unlike the Court's prior orders, the District Court vacated the AM–3 mining plan pending completion of the EIS. As a result, Signal Peak is prohibited from mining the leased federal coal, which is located in a checkerboard pattern throughout the AM–3 permit area, unless and until OSMRE completes the AM–3 EIS and the Assistant Secretary of Land and Minerals Management re-approves the AM–3 mining plan.

EIS Preparation

Given the potentially devastating impacts that the unprecedented vacatur order would have on coal production at the Bull Mountains Mine and its workforce, SPE quickly moved to coordinate with OSMRE on the EIS process. SPE had been mining in the AM–3 Area since 2015, and this mining continued up to the vacatur order in February 2023. The initial schedule prepared by OSMRE anticipated issuance of a final EIS by July 2024.

Unfortunately, in the intervening two years nothing has proceeded according to OSMRE's schedule. An initial Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS was not published until August 2023. OSMRE then held two public comment periods on its decision to prepare an EIS in September 2023 and June 2024.

OSMRE gave excuse after excuse about why more time was needed to complete the EIS and insisted on additional studies on matters that were not found to be deficient by the court and were not deemed necessary by Montana DEQ. For example, a year after the EIS process had begun, OSMRE ordered an additional study on acid mine drainage from the Bull Mountains Mine Waste Disposal Area.

With more than a decade of sampling down-gradient water at the Bull Mountains Mine, the Montana DEQ and SPE knew that the waste coal did not produce acid drainage. Despite first-hand experience with the coal waste drainage and the objection of the Montana DEQ, OSM still insisted that the coal waste drainage study be completed. Given the economic need to complete the Bull Mountains EIS, SPE acquiesced to OSM's request and agreed to pay a contractor to complete the study. The hydrology contractor's report was only completed in early 2025 and confirmed what SPE and Montana DEQ told OSM over a year prior—the coal waste from the Bull Mountains Mine does not produce acid drainage.

SPE has spent over $3 million in the two and a half years since the EIS effort began to complete the EIS and get back to mining federal coal in the Bull Mountains.

SPE Efforts to Keep the Bull Mountains Mine Open

In addition to pursuing timely completion of the EIS, SPE took immediate actions to keep the Bull Mountains Mine operational and its (at the time) over 300 employees working.

Initially, SPE modified its longwall operations in the AM–3 area so that it could mine private coal with the longwall in the current location until the longwall reached federal coal. The mining of this private coal was completed in Q2 2024. Second, SPE worked with Montana DEQ to secure approval to mine two areas of private coal that border AM–3. Mining of this coal, of lower quality and found in a narrower seam, is more than half complete and the coal will be exhausted by the end of 2025. These efforts are shown on the attached map.

These actions, which required significant modifications of SPE's Montana DEQ approved mine plan, cost over $70 million in additional and unanticipated mine expenses over the last two years. However, despite SPE's efforts, at the end of 2025, in the absence of approval from OSMRE to mine the remaining federal coal in

AM–3, SPE will be forced to suspend operations and lay off workers, dozens of whom are already idled because of the lack of development work available for the continuous mining team (the miners who prepare each new longwall panel for mining).

Need for H.R. 931

H.R. 931 is a quick, narrow fix to avoid closure of the Mine in the coming months. Not all the federal coal in AM–3 is authorized for mining—only the portion necessary to allow mining in the immediate future. This legislation does not circumvent the National Environmental Policy Act or reduce environmental review. Rather, it recognizes the practical reality that this project has already undergone multiple layers of review over the past decade and that SPE has made substantial good-faith investments in compliance.

H.R. 931 authorizes the mining of 779 acres of specific federal coal in AM–3. The identified federal coal will allow SPE to resume mining in longwall panels 10 and 11 and development work for most of longwall panel 12. This mining will produce 13 million tons of federal coal. Significantly, H.R. 931 would provide access to 161 acres of state coal and 699 acres of private coal which have been effectively sterilized since February 2023; that is, given the checkerboard pattern of coal ownership and SPE's use of longwall mining techniques, SPE cannot mine this state and private coal without the ability to mine the adjacent federal coal. The mining authorized by H.R. 931 would need to be completed in compliance with the AM–3 mine plan and would be done consistent with all State and federal environmental requirements.

SPE cannot mine the remaining federal coal in AM–3 until OSMRE completes its EIS and the Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management approves the AM–3 mine plan modification.

Conclusion

H.R. 931 is a practical solution to the challenges confronting SPE and the impending closure of the Bull Mountains Mine. It would prevent economic harm and bolster our nation's energy production. I respectfully urge this Committee to support the bill and ensure that Montanans who depend on the Bull Mountains Mine can continue to work, raise families, and contribute to the strength of our nation.

Thank you for your time and this opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.

Supplemental document submitted for the record:

EXHIBIT A

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD020.pdf

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QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MR. PARKER PHIPPS, PRESIDENT AND CEO, SIGNAL PEAK ENERGY, LLC

Questions Submitted by Representative Ansari

Dear Chairman Stauber: This letter responds to the questions submitted by Representative Ansari following my testimony at the May 20, 2025 hearing before the Committee on Natural Resources' Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources on H.R. 931, the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification Act.

Question 1. Has Signal Peak ever canceled or terminated a rancher's lease? If so, please list the affected leases and justification for cancelation or termination.

Answer. Signal Peak owns a portion of the surface property above its Bull Mountains No. 1 Mine ("Mine"). For more than thirty years, Signal Peak has granted surface grazing rights to third parties under leases specifically providing that these grazing rights shall terminate if the lessee violates the term of the lease, or if Signal Peak required to utilize its surface property to support its mining operations.

Signal Peak terminated one such grazing lease in 2021 when the lessee violated the terms of the lease by engaging in unauthorized subleasing. Later in 2021, Signal Peak notified a second lessee that it required use of its surface property to support the expansion and development of the Mine. Although this lessee filed a lawsuit asserting objections to Signal Peak's exercise of these lease rights, the parties subsequently resolved this matter amicably with Signal Peak agreeing to purchase this lessee's adjacent surface property in its entirety. To be clear, Signal Peak's actions to terminate both leases were undertaken in strict accordance with the terms of these leases.

Question 2. Has Signal Peak ever asked a rancher to sign a non-disclosure agreement? If so, how many?

Answer. Since I joined Signal Peak, the company has never asked a rancher to execute a non-disclosure agreement. With regard to the lawsuit referenced in section 1 above, the parties entered into a standard settlement agreement that contained a mutual confidentiality and non—disparagement clause. Both parties were represented by counsel in connection with this settlement.

Question 3. Has Signal Peak or its contractors or consultants ever modeled whether the deep aquifer has enough water to replace the water the mine is draining from the Bull Mountains? If so, please attach or provide a citation for said modeling.

Answer. As a threshold matter, Signal Peak's operations are not "draining" water from the Bull Mountains. Surface and groundwater resources within the subsidence zone are intensely monitored before, during, and after undermining. Signal Peak's biannual and annual hydrology reports and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's cumulative hydrologic impact assessments disprove this false assertion.

Signal Peak modeled the deep underburden aquifer—a designated potential source of replacement water—in 2015. That model—together with Signal Peak's comprehensive groundwater model—are routinely updated and recalibrated as new data becomes available. Both models have been scrutinized and accepted by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

In 2016, environmental advocacy organizations challenged the legal and physical viability of the deep underburden aquifer to serve as a potential source of replacement water. In 2022, the Montana Board of Environmental Review dismissed these claims as legally and factually baseless and admonished the environmental advocacy organizations for misrepresenting the facts and presenting evidence out of context. *In the Matter of: Appeal Amendment Application AM3, Signal Peak Energy LLC's Bull Mountains Mine No. 1, Permit No. C1993017,* Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Order, No. BER 2016–07 SM (BER June 16, 2022). The Board's Final Order is enclosed as **Exhibit A**.

With respect to the physical availability of the deep underburden aquifer, the Montana Board of Environmental Review specifically found that the aquifer is "massive" and "extends over a broad area throughout the Bull Mountains" approximately "14 miles wide and 22 miles long." The Montana Board of Environmental Review concluded that the deep underburden aquifer "has the characteristics to serve existing and viable designated uses" together with all anticipated mitigations needs.

To date, Signal Peak has not sourced replacement water from the deep underburden aquifer and, given the very minor hydrologic impacts realized after nearly two decades of longwall mining, does not anticipate doing so in the future.

Question 4. Who is the first buyer or off-taker of coal mined by Signal Peak? Does Signal Peak sell its coal to an affiliated company or intermediary entity prior to shipping or for shipping?

Answer. Signal Peak sells coal destined for the international market to its marketing and sales affiliate, Global Coal Sales Group, LLC ("GCSG"). In compliance with Federal and state law, the sales price paid by GCSG is determined based upon the netback FOB Mine price for these international sales.

Question 5. In the hearing, you stated that Signal Peak "currently complies with all Federal and state laws." Please provide a list of all crimes that Signal Peak Energy or its executives have been charged with, convicted of or plead guilty to since you have begun working for the company in February 2020.

Answer. Signal Peak complies with all Federal and state laws. Since I joined Signal Peak in February 2020, no Federal or state criminal charges have been asserted against Signal Peak or its executives.

On September 21, 2021, Signal Peak pled guilty to four counts of violation of mandatory health and safety standards pursuant to 30 U.S.C. § 820(d) based upon (1) the failure to secure permits for the disposal of coal slurry in 2013 and 2015, and (2) the failure to report two workplace accidents in 2018. This conduct occurred years before I was hired by Signal Peak. The company paid the requisite fines for each violation immediately at the time of sentencing, did not object to the presentence investigation report prepared by the USPO, and has fully complied with all terms of probation, which has now concluded. In the plea agreement, the U.S. Attorney recommended that the "offense level be decreased by two levels for acceptance of responsibility, pursuant to USSG § 3E1.1(a)." As the Government stated at the time of sentencing, this plea agreement was influenced by two mitigating factors: (a) Signal Peak's significant cooperation with the U.S. Attorneys' investigations, and (b) the fact that Signal Peak's owners had no knowledge of and were not involved in unlawful conduct.

Following my hire by Signal Peak in February 2020, the following former Signal Peak employees pled guilty in connection with the conduct identified above, which again pre-dated my employment with Signal Peak:

- **Dale Musgrave**—In December 2021, Mr. Musgrave pled guilty to conspiracy to submit false mine records regarding an employee injury. He was sentenced to 2 years' probation and fined $20,000.
- **Curtis Floyd**—In January 2023, Mr. Floyd pled guilty to conspiracy to submit false mine records regarding an employee injury. He was sentenced to 2 years' probation and fined $2,000.

Question 6. According to Mine Safety and Health Administration data, the Bull Mountains mine has had 1,982 reported MSHA violations and 159 accidents since Signal Peak Energy began operating the mine in 2008. This includes hundreds of reported MSHA violations since you began working for Signal Peak. Please summarize the violations that have taken place while you have been CEO and the total amount of penalty that Signal Peak has paid in relation to those violations, describe how Signal Peak Energy has sought to remediate or mitigate the damages from those violations, and explain how Signal Peak Energy plans to prevent violations in the future.

Answer. Signal Peak is proud of its safety record at the Mine. Underground mining is an inherently dangerous undertaking, and Signal Peak is committed to maintaining a safe workplace for its skilled workforce. Signal Peak demands best safety practices, rigorous and continuing training, and immediate corrective action when safety issues arise. The Mine Safety and Health Administration ("MSHA") inspects Signal Peak's operations monthly, and Signal Peak strives to comply with all applicable workplace safety regulations. Alleged violations and associated penalties are available on the Mine Data Retrieval System.

The number of referenced citations issued by MSHA since 2008 is not indicative of poor safety practices by Signal Peak. To the contrary, Signal Peak is recognized as one of the safest underground mines in the United States. By way of illustration, in 2024 Signal Peak received 146 total citations, only 4 of which were deemed "significant and substantial." And in 2023, Signal Peak received 167 total citations, only 5 of which were deemed "significant and substantial." During my tenure, MSHA has never determined that Signal Peak met any "pattern of violation" criteria suggesting that the Mine exhibited a chronic pattern of safety and health violations. In fact, Signal Peak has consistently ranked among the top quartile of mines in the United States with respect to the number of "significant and substantial" citations issued by MSHA.

In 2021, to ensure that the Mine consistently followed best mining practices and strictly adhered to applicable law, Signal Peak retained an independent expert to conduct bi-annual audits focusing on the company's safety and environmental functions. In the most recent audit in 2024, this expert concluded that:

- Signal Peak's commitment to employee safety, environmental compliance, record-keeping, and operational performance is outstanding. The mining operation ranks at the peak of underground coal industry performance in terms of its adherence to mandatory health and safety standards.
- The Mine's accident rate frequencies are better than industry norms. Observations of the underground workings and surface facilities demonstrate a sustained and ongoing commitment to industry-leading operating and maintenance standards. Documentation and site visits indicate that Signal Peak fully complies with environmental and permitting requirements.

I trust that the above information fully addresses the questions submitted by Representative Ansari.

Mr. EZELL [presiding]. The gentleman yields. I now recognize the gentleman from Alaska, Mr. Begich, for 30 seconds to introduce our next witness.

Mr. BEGICH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am especially pleased to welcome our next witness, Mr. Mike West, who serves as the

State Seismologist for Alaska and the Director of the Alaska Earthquake Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Mr. West is not only a nationally recognized expert in seismic and volcanic hazards, but also an Alaskan and a constituent. His leadership has been critical to advancing real-time monitoring and hazard mitigation strategies in our state, a place that experiences more earthquakes and volcanic activity than anywhere else in the country. I am grateful for his service and for the insight he brings today as we examine legislation that will directly impact the safety and preparedness of communities across Alaska and the Nation.

Welcome to Washington.

Mr. EZELL. Dr. West, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MIKE WEST, DIRECTOR AND STATE SEISMOLOGIST, ALASKA EARTHQUAKE CENTER, FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

Dr. WEST. Chairman Stauber, Ranking Member Ansari, I appreciate the opportunity to talk today about earthquake, volcano, and landslide legislation. I direct the Alaska Earthquake Center. I spent 10 years as part of the Alaska Volcano Observatory, and my recent research focuses on monitoring landslides. I feel well positioned for this.

The National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program, known as NEHRP, is one of the most successful pieces of hazards legislation ever. Coming up on its 50th anniversary, it coordinates the efforts of four agencies: the U.S. Geological Survey; the National Science Foundation; FEMA; NIST. In my opinion, this is what smart, collaborative government looks like.

I can paraphrase the goal of NEHRP very simply: reducing the economic impacts and the fatalities of earthquakes.

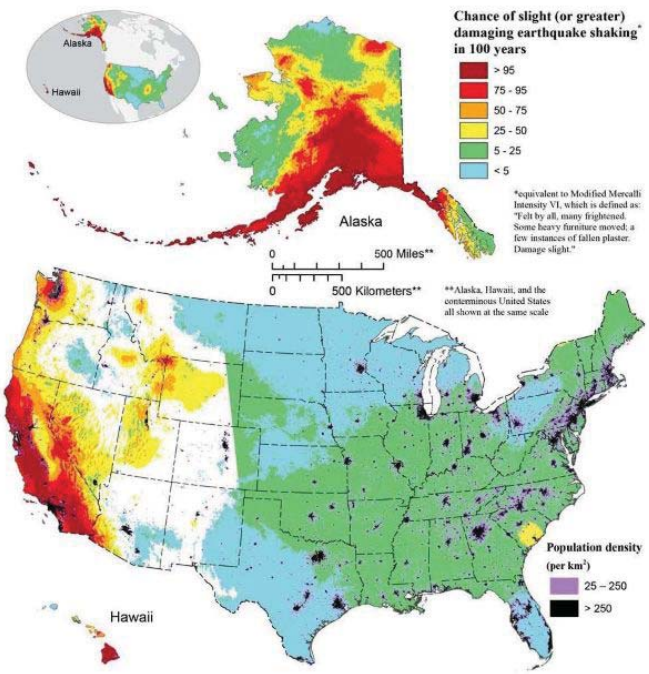

Figure 1. The 2023 National Seismic Hazard Map. Warm colors show regions where damaging earthquake shaking is mostly likely to occur. From Mark D. Petersen et al. (2025).

Dr. WEST. Here, in the figure on the screen, this is just one of NEHRP's many deliverables. This is the National Seismic Hazard Map. Led by the USGS, this map shows the shaking to be expected from future earthquakes. This is a scientific masterpiece that reflects 50 years of the NEHRP program. This map informs hundreds of billions of dollars in infrastructure design. It drives insurance rates, building codes, land use decisions, emergency response.

That said, the work of NEHRP is not done. Just three States so far have the USGS's ShakeAlert system, which is capable of providing warning before shaking even starts. Four months ago, the USGS published a ShakeAlert plan for Alaska. There are other states that are developing plans, as well. But it is NEHRP legislation that will provide the national coordination that can make ShakeAlert more broadly accessible.

Let's change gears. How about the second figure now?

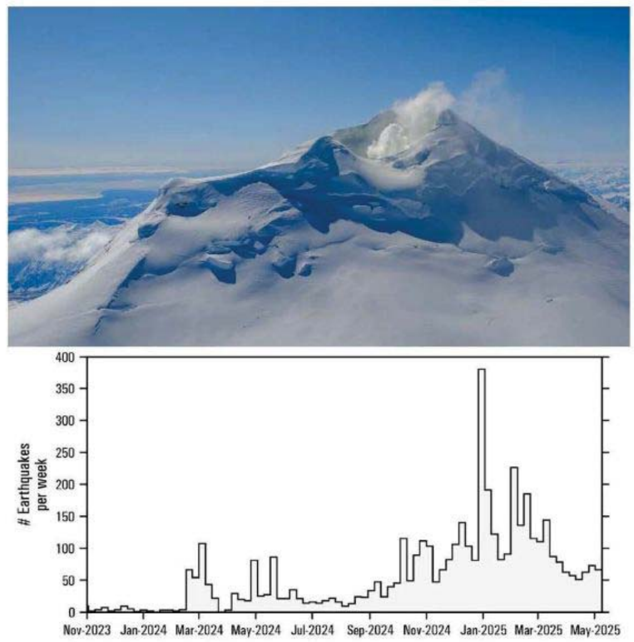

Figure 2. *(Top) Summit of Mt. Spurr, Alaska showing steam associated with recent unrest. Photo taken April 25, 2025 during a gas survey of the summit. Credit: Matt Loewen. (Bottom) Earthquake data demonstrating that the unrest began early in 2024. Both images courtesy of AVO/USGS.*

Dr. WEST. The National Volcano Early Warning System, a.k.a. NVEWS, is a similar piece of legislation. The U.S. is home to 58 high-threat volcanoes. On occasion they put ash in the air, they create lava flows, landslides, toxic gases. But with the right research and monitoring, we can actually forecast most of these. That helps prevent unnecessary evacuations, protects infrastructure, and can reduce the costs of responding to disasters. It also protects aviation by detecting airborne ash that threatens planes.

The recent unrest of Mount Spurr, shown here on the screen, in my home state is an outstanding example of volcano warning. Just outside of Anchorage, this photo shows steam and gas from the summit. On the bottom is a chart of earthquake activity over the past 16 months. Together with other data, the Alaska Volcano Observatory has used these to issue increasingly detailed forecasts for many months now. The problem is that most U.S. volcanoes aren't monitored like Spurr. Fully implementing NVEWS would fix this.

Landslides. Good numbers on landslides are hard to come by. That is something that the bill before you would actually help address. But even 20 years ago, annual costs were estimated above $2 billion. They affect nearly every State, anywhere that there is steep terrain and heavy rainfall. The Oso landslide, mentioned earlier in Washington State, killed 43 people in 2014. The California storms in 2023 triggered hundreds of slides and billions in damage. We have some evidence that landslides are increasing in frequency.

Figure 3. *Examples of recent landslides in Southeast Alaska. Deadly landslides of this style have happened nearly annually in recent years affecting communities over a vast region. The geographic spread of these events presents a challenge for monitoring and assessment. (Top) 2023 Wrangell landslide. Photo credit: Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. (Bottom) 2024 Ketchikan, landslide. Photo credit: Travis Watkins, Associated Press.*

Dr. WEST. In figure three, on the screen right now, you will see the landslide on top in Wrangell, Alaska that killed 6 people in 2023. On the bottom is a 2024 slide in Ketchikan. These disasters are becoming a near annual experience in my State.

The Landslide Act empowers the USGS with State partners to map, monitor, and respond to landslides nationwide.

So, I am thrilled that you are considering all three of these bills together today, because they share a common set of proven strategies. Each program tracks long-term patterns in the Earth. How do you track long-term patterns? Well, with long-term instrumentation and monitoring. With years of baseline data, it becomes possible to know when a hazard is developing or where it is most likely to occur. These programs build formal collaborations between Federal agencies, universities, State geological surveys, each bringing what they do best.

So, earthquakes, volcanoes, landslides, they are part of the planet on which we live. We can't make them go away. But the surest way to minimize their impacts, human and financial, is to update and reauthorize the bills that affirm our national stance. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. West follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL E. WEST, PHD, STATE SEISMOLOGIST FOR ALASKA RESEARCH PROFESSOR, DIRECTOR, ALASKA EARTHQUAKE CENTER UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS

Chairman Stauber and Ranking Member Ansari, thank you for the opportunity to speak about three bills: the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP), the National Volcano Early Warning System (NVEWS) and the National Landslide Preparedness Act (NLPA). These bills, and the programs they support, are interrelated. As such, I applaud the committee for considering them together.

I have personal experience and expertise with all three bills. In my role as State Seismologist at the Alaska Earthquake Center I direct the earthquake monitoring efforts in Alaska. I previously spent 10 years working as part of the Alaska Volcano Observatory. And for the past few years, much of my research time has been devoted to the challenge of monitoring landslides in real-time. My work focuses on Alaska—a state with a disproportionate share of the nation's geologic hazards. I illustrate the impact of this legislation with examples from Alaska. However, these examples are just a few among countless examples nationwide that could be presented to motivate this legislation. I am in daily contact with peers around the country who carry similar responsibilities in their regions. I am certain my testimony reflects the sentiments of the numerous practitioners nationwide. Below I provide brief comments on each bill followed by a discussion of the common themes across them.

National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program

NEHRP is one of the most successful pieces of natural hazard legislation in existence. It has been a model for other legislation including the volcano and landslide bills. Created by Congress in 1977, the NEHRP program establishes coordination across federal agencies, state agencies, academia, and the private sector. This coordination has led to advances in seismic monitoring, building codes, engineering practices, and public education. It has saved lifes and saved billions of dollars. NEHRP is an example of good government, leveraging the strengths of different agencies instead of duplicating one another. Under NEHRP, the National Science Foundation (NSF) brings fundamental new insights in earthquake science and engineering. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) makes seismic monitoring possible, while also quantifying the nation's specific earthquake hazards. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) identifies the risks and earthquake vulnerabilities and then works with communities to mitigate these risks before they occur. And the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) provides coordination across these efforts while ensuring that research and lessons learned are translated into specific codes and building practices.

Investing in seismic monitoring lowers long-term costs by guiding smarter decisions before and after earthquakes. Reliable ground motion data from seismic networks supports better building codes and retrofitting standards. These reduce damage to infrastructure and cut repair costs after a damaging earthquake. Real-time monitoring allows engineers and emergency managers to focus resources where they are most needed, avoiding unnecessary inspections and shutdowns. For businesses, rapid damage assessments minimize downtime, keeping commerce moving and reducing overall economic losses. Transportation systems, pipelines, ports, and utilities use seismic data to assess whether it is necessary to stop operations, and how to resume safely. During the recovery phase of a major earthquake the detailed shaking data can help guide repairs and replacements that are safer and more cost-effective. Every dollar spent on seismic monitoring yields significant savings by reducing direct damages, speeding recovery, and limiting disruptions to businesses and public services.

A foundation of NEHRP's success has been the Advanced National Seismic System (ANSS), a comprehensive network of seismic instruments and data centers coordinated by the USGS in partnership with earthquake centers in each region of the country (USGS, 2017). These centers provide expertise on the unique seismic hazards of their areas, from Alaska to California to the Central and Eastern U.S. The monitoring networks they operate maintain dense sensor coverage where it is most needed, ensuring that earthquakes are assessed quickly and ground shaking is measured accurately. Seismic network operators understand local geology, infrastructure, and community needs, allowing them to provide high-quality data and targeted information to emergency managers, engineers, and the public. This local capability feeds into the national system, maintained by the USGS, making ANSS both comprehensive and responsive. Without strong regional networks, national earthquake monitoring would be slower, less accurate, and less effective in protecting communities.

One of NEHRP's clearest deliverables is the National Seismic Hazard Map (Petersen et al., 2023). Led by the USGS, this map shows the expected level of ground shaking from future earthquakes. It combines data on past earthquakes, faults, and ground motion models to estimate the likelihood and intensity of shaking in different areas. This map is the scientific basis for building codes, helping engineers design structures to withstand expected earthquakes, while also helping to avoid costly mitigation strategies where they are not needed. It guides infrastructure planning, insurance rates, land use decisions, and emergency response. States and cities use it to identify high-risk areas and prepare accordingly.

I have witnessed the impact of NEHRP first hand, most notably during the magnitude 7.1 Anchorage Earthquake in 2018 (West et al., 2019). This earthquake was deeply impactful to the region and was responsible for hundreds of millions of dollars in damage. Thousands of homes and buildings were damaged. But remarkably, not a single building collapsed entirely. As a result, no one died during the earthquake. This success can be attributed almost entirely to NEHRP. Because of decades of research and implementation, modern seismic building codes were in place across much of south-central Alaska, significantly reducing structural damage despite violent shaking. Seismic hazard models, developed through NEHRP support, had helped guide construction practices. NEHRP investments in seismic monitoring enabled real-time data collection and rapid post-event analyses, assisting state agencies and emergency responders in assessing infrastructure impacts. Public education campaigns and preparedness initiatives, championed by NEHRP partners, ensured that schools, businesses, and residents knew how to "Drop, Cover, and Hold On," reducing injuries. The Anchorage earthquake is an example of how NEHRP's long-term, research-based approach directly enhances community resilience and public safety.

The work of NEHRP is not done. Alaska experiences more large earthquakes than any other state, yet it does not have access to the ShakeAlert Earthquake Early Warning system. ShakeAlert, and other earthquake early warning systems, uses real-time data to provide seconds of warning before strong shaking arrives. This response time provides people time to take protective actions and allows critical systems to shut down safely. The ShakeAlert system was prototyped in California, Oregon, and Washington states with the plan to roll out these capabilities more widely once it was fully operational. The build out in these three states is now complete. In January 2025, the USGS published the ShakeAlert implementation plan for Alaska (Wolfe et al., 2025). Other states are in the process of developing ShakeAlert plans as well. NEHRP is critical to these expansions. NEHRP provides the framework for national coordination, and authorizes the resources needed to continue to expand the implementation of ShakeAlert. The geophysical network built to support earthquake early warning has the dual benefit of strengthening tsunami warning capabilities. Dense seismic and GPS sensor coverage allows the rapid assessment of offshore earthquakes that can generate tsunamis. Rapidly measuring the style of faulting makes it possible to issue faster, more accurate tsunami alerts. Investing in earthquake early warning networks creates shared infrastructure that supports both fast ground shaking alerts and timely tsunami warnings, protecting coastal communities from multiple hazards.

National Volcano Early Warning System

The National Volcano Early Warning System (NVEWS) reduces the risks and costs of eruptions through a mix of early detection, monitoring, and public communication.

The United States is home to more than 160 active volcanoes, many of which pose serious threats to communities, infrastructure, and critical air routes (Ewert et al., 2018). Alaska alone has over 50 volcanoes that have been active in historic times, many located along major international flight paths. As just one example, the 1989 Redoubt Volcano event sent ash clouds into the atmosphere, disrupting air traffic across the Pacific and causing complete engine failure in one commercial passenger jet. Similar risks exist in the Cascades, Hawaii, and other volcanic regions. In Hawaii, the eruption of Kilauea in 2018 destroyed hundreds of homes and forced large-scale evacuations. Volcanoes in Washington, such as Mount Rainier, pose significant lahar (volcanic mudflow) risks to populations in the Puget Sound region. Eruptions can cause varied hazards, including ashfall, lava flows, landslides, and volcanic gases, that can affect broad areas even away from the volcano. Monitoring helps forecast these events and provide time to prepare.

NVEWS unifies the U.S. volcano observatories into a single, national system. This improved efficiency is coupled with modern instrumentation, real-time data transmission, and advanced forecasting tools. Faster more accurate volcanic warnings reduce the risks to life and infrastructure by giving communities and emergency managers more time to respond. It also protects aviation by detecting ash-producing eruptions that threaten aircraft. Early warnings minimize economic disruption by preventing unplanned evacuations, protecting infrastructure, and reducing the need for disaster response and recovery. NVEWS is a cost-effective way to reduce the human and financial impact of volcanic eruptions.

The recent unrest of Mount Spurr volcano illustrates the success of early warning (Figure 2). Spurr is labeled by the USGS as a very high threat volcano near Anchorage, Alaska that for many months now has been understood to be in a state of unrest. Tiny earthquakes, ground deformation, and gas emissions all point to patterns that are similar to the last few Spurr eruptions. Together this information has allowed the Alaska Volcano Observatory (the Alaska component of NVEWS) to issue regular and well-informed eruption forecasts in recent months. When Spurr does erupt, previous NVEWS efforts will make it possible to warn about individual explosions and forecast ash fall.

Unlike Mt. Spurr, many high-threat volcanoes in the U.S. still lack modern instruments and real-time monitoring. Fully implementing NVEWS would close those gaps and provide more universal coverage. It would allow for earlier detection of unrest at sites that currently pose blind spots. The system would also strengthen coordination between federal and state agencies, ensuring faster, unified responses. By giving communities and infrastructure managers more time to act, NVEWS reduces the cost of emergency response and recovery. Investing now lowers the economic risk and avoids more expensive disaster impacts later.

National Landslide Preparedness Act

Landslides pose a persistent and costly threat across the United States. Though national loss estimates for landslides are generally lacking, the National Landslide Preparedness Act (NLPA) helps address this by providing better systems for tracking and assessing landslides. Even 20 years ago, however, the annual costs were estimated to exceed two billion dollars (Spiker and Gori, 2023). These hazards are widespread, affecting nearly every state (Luna et al., 2025). They are especially common in regions with steep terrain, heavy rainfall, or wildfire burn scars—such as Alaska, the Pacific Northwest, California, and Appalachia. The 2014 Oso landslide in Washington, which killed 43 people and destroyed dozens of homes, remains a poignant example of the risks posed by large slope failures. More recently, intense storms in California in 2023 triggered dozens of damaging debris flows and slope collapses along unstable hillsides. Extreme rain events, wildfire, and glacial retreat make slopes more vulnerable. These factors appear to be increasing the frequency, and possibly the severity, of landslides.

Landslide hazards are geographically widespread but unevenly monitored and poorly mapped in many parts of the country. A national approach helps close these gaps. It also makes it possible to standardize data and support consistent hazard assessment across state lines. Without federal coordination, many high-risk regions—especially rural—lack the tools to assess landslide susceptibility and lack the ability to issue meaningful warnings. The USGS approach outlined in the NLPA is designed to complement and strengthen state and local efforts by providing data, technical expertise, and coordination tools that many jurisdictions cannot develop on their own. State agencies are the primary source of local knowledge, field data, and public outreach networks. Federal support helps the states to implement early warning systems, prioritize mitigation projects, and respond more effectively to landslide events. This two-way collaboration ensures that federal tools and science reach the communities that need it most, while empowering states to lead the risk reduction efforts.

The National Landslide Preparedness Act empowers the U.S. Geological Survey to coordinate a strategy to identify, map, monitor, and respond to landslide hazards nationwide. This legislation is particularly vital for states like Alaska, where steep terrain, heavy precipitation, seismic activity, and thawing permafrost contribute to heightened landslide risks. The NLPA facilitates collaboration between federal agencies and state entities to develop detailed landslide inventories and susceptibility maps, and to implement monitoring systems in high-risk areas like Prince William Sound and Southeast Alaska. By providing funding, technical expertise, and interagency coordination, the National Landslide Preparedness Act strengthens local capacities to mitigate landslide risks, protect communities, and enhance public safety across Alaska and the broader United States.

The November 2023 Wrangell landslide in Southeast Alaska exemplifies the challenge. Following days of intense rainfall, a large slope failed, sending a massive debris flow downslope that destroyed homes and claimed the lives of six people. Instability on other nearby slopes prompted evacuations and emergency monitoring that demonstrated the event was part of a broader sequence of failures across the region. Nearly the same event occurred a year later in Ketchikan (Figure 3). These tragedies illustrate several priorities of the NLPA. These include the need for high-resolution hazard mapping, real-time landslide assessment, and coordinated federal-state response capabilities. The NLPA framework makes it possible for the U.S. Geological Survey to partner with the Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys and the Alaska Earthquake Center to install remote sensors, expand landslide inventories, and develop early warning tools. By supporting these activities, the NLPA can help prevent similar events in vulnerable communities in Alaska and elsewhere.

Just as national coordination has improved earthquake and volcano hazard mitigation, a similar model is needed to reduce landslide losses and protect public safety.

Themes Common to All Bills

The programs supported by these three bills share a set of proven strategies. They rely on strong federal-state-academic partnerships, robust instrumentation networks, and sustained observation and research programs.

Each program captures long-term data that make it possible to discern the geophysical and geological patterns unique to each hazard. Years of these baseline data often make it possible to know when a hazard is developing. Often these data enable forecasts of specific impacts, making it possible for individuals and communities to prepare.

Each program also formalizes collaboration between federal agencies, universities, and state geological surveys. This approach harnesses local expertise and knowledge, while providing national standards and economies of scale.

Investments in the monitoring networks that power these programs—whether for earthquakes, volcanoes, or landslides—enable timely warnings, accurate hazard assessments, and cost reduction through mitigation efforts. Updating and reauthorizing the bills that affirm these programs is the surest way to minimize the impact of these events on society and the surest way to minimize the costs of recovery from these infrequent, but often devastating, natural hazards.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Helton for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF DOUG HELTON, FORMER REGIONAL OPERATIONS SUPERVISOR, EMERGENCY RESPONSE DIVISION (RETIRED), NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Mr. HELTON. Chairman Stauber, Ranking Member Ansari, and Subcommittee members, thank you for the opportunity to speak about the major risks of offshore drilling and NOAA's role in protecting coastal communities, marine ecosystems, and the

American people. My name is Doug Helton. Until recently I served in NOAA's Emergency Response Division, providing scientific and technical support during oil spill responses. Today, I am speaking on my own behalf. After 33 years of service, I retired alongside more than 1,000 other NOAA employees who left amid the Trump administration's effort to gut the agency. Together we represented 27,000 years of experience. It is an irreplaceable loss that endangers Americans' health, safety, and the economy.

As an oil spill expert, I am deeply concerned by this Administration and this Committee's attempts to expand offshore drilling. During my time at NOAA, I worked on preparedness and response efforts up and down the country's coasts, from Maine to the Arctic to American Samoa. I also chaired the Oil Spill Recovery Institute, created in response to the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill. Given my extensive experience, deep concern about NOAA, and recognition of the widespread public opposition to offshore drilling, I am here today to testify in opposition to the Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025 and the CORE Act of 2025.

The Offshore Lands Authorities Act would revoke permanent protections from oil and gas drilling in the Atlantic, Pacific, eastern Gulf, and Arctic, areas established by presidential withdrawal, while also limiting future withdrawals. These presidential withdrawals, including those enacted by President Trump, didn't happen in a vacuum. They happened after decades of sustained bipartisan opposition to offshore drilling. Nearly 400 municipalities, 2,300 Republican, Democratic, and independent elected officials, 55,000 coastal businesses, 500,000 fishing families, national defense interests, and Members of Congress have all formally opposed expanded offshore drilling. The communities most impacted by this bill are overwhelmingly against it.

Every year NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration responds to over 150 oil and chemical spills. The simple truth is that whenever and wherever you drill, produce, transport, or store oil, there is risk. Expanding that footprint, as this bill proposes, multiplies that risk just as the budget and staffing cuts are impacting the agency's ability to respond.

The Deepwater Horizon example remains a sobering example. I worked 16-hour days for 87 days straight until the well was capped. The cleanup took years more. Despite a response of 45,000 people and highly specialized equipment, only a fraction of the oil was recovered.

Even smaller spills can cause serious harm. A spill in Tampa Bay, for instance, polluted 13 miles of beach, harming wildlife and disrupting fishing.

Oil spills in Alaska are particularly concerning. The North Slope is remote and difficult to access. Getting proper equipment can take weeks. Housing the number of responders needed would also be logistically impossible, and severe weather and long winter darkness would create major additional challenges.

All told, this bill's proposal to eliminate protections across the U.S. waters will invite oil and gas development on every coast, risking spills we can't contain, and harming ecosystems and economies for decades.

Although not part of my area of specific expertise, I also want to express concern about the CORE Act. This bill would prioritize seismic testing and drilling even in sensitive areas, seismic testing that involves repeated high-decibel blasts that travel hundreds of miles underwater which can seriously impact marine wildlife.

These risks are magnified by the Trump administration's rollback of safety regulations and its dismantling of the very Federal agencies responsible for oil spill prevention and response. Cuts to agency budgets and staff mean fewer inspections, weaker safeguards, and slower responses. With hurricane season just 12 days away, these stakes could not be higher. Expanding offshore drilling while also weakening our Federal response capacity is a dangerous combination.

In closing, after more than three decades responding to spills, I have seen firsthand the devastating, often irreversible impacts to communities, ecosystems, and livelihoods. These bills ignore the will of the American people and unnecessarily increase the risk of catastrophic oil spills, especially in areas lacking the capacity to respond. I respectfully urge the Subcommittee to weigh these risks before advancing these bills.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Helton follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DOUGLAS (DOUG) HELTON

Chairman Stauber, Ranking Member Ansari, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the major risks of offshore drilling and the importance of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in protecting the American people, coastal communities, and marine ecosystems from harm, particularly in the context of offshore oil and gas drilling.

Background

My name is Doug Helton, and until recently, I served as the Regional Operations Supervisor for NOAA's Emergency Response Division, providing scientific and technical support during oil spill responses. After 33 years of service, I retired a few weeks ago along with over 1,000 other NOAA employees driven out by the Trump administration's efforts to gut the agency and the critical data and services it provides for the American people. Together, we represented a loss of 27,000 years of expertise at the agency, a loss that endangers Americans' health, safety, and economies.

As an oil spill expert, this danger is particularly troubling as the Administration and some Members of Congress seek to expand the footprint of offshore drilling nationwide. During my time at NOAA, I worked on oil spills, shipwrecks, abandoned vessels, and emergency response efforts in almost all coastal states, ranging from Maine to American Samoa, including Deepwater Horizon. I have extensive experience in oil spill preparedness and response, including work across the U.S., the Arctic, and Alaska. As the NOAA and Department of Commerce representative to the Alaska Regional Response Team, I supported statewide and transboundary incident response. I served as a U.S. delegate to the Arctic Council's emergency preparedness subcommittee and worked on transboundary pollution agreements. I also chaired the federally mandated Oil Spill Recovery Institute in Cordova, Alaska, which was created in response to the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill. Before my NOAA career, I conducted salmon research in Bristol Bay and the Bering Sea, where I had previously worked as a commercial fisherman.

Given my extensive experience in oil spill recovery, my deep concern about cuts to NOAA's operations, and my recognition of the opposition by communities to the expansion of drilling to their coasts, I am here today to testify in opposition to the Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025 and the CORE Act of 2025.

Opposition to Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025

I understand that the Offshore Lands Authorities Act of 2025 not only looks to revoke the permanent ocean protections for the Atlantic, Pacific, and Eastern Gulf coasts as well as the Arctic Ocean areas that Presidents Biden and Obama withdrew from oil and gas leasing disposition, but also goes further to significantly limit the ability of future presidents to withdraw areas by limiting the amount of ocean that can be withdrawn and removing the president's ability to permanently protect certain areas, among other provisions.

Unchecked oil and gas development in our coastal waters comes at the expense of our ocean, public health, local businesses, fisheries, and marine ecosystems. The permanent withdrawals of this past January by President Biden as well as the September 2020 withdrawals by President Trump of the waters of the Southeastern United States for 10 years (from and including the waters of North Carolina through Florida—came in response to decades of building opposition to drilling by coastal communities, including opposition from Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle representing these very communities. To date, nearly 400 municipalities and counties and over 2,300 elected officials—Republicans, Democrats, and Independents—across the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf have formally opposed the expansion of offshore drilling to their coasts. In addition to individual citizen voices and those of elected officials, voices from defense communities and business coalitions representing over 55,000 coastal businesses and 500,000 fishing families along the three coasts of the Lower 48 weighed in, calling for the previous administration to issue permanent coastal protections. These ocean areas should remain protected. The voices of the people who live in these coastal communities that would be negatively impacted by this bill are overwhelming in their opposition to drilling.

I believe that many of the millions of Americans who want their coasts protected from drilling and spilling have memories of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, which unfolded 15 years ago this past April 20, and which has had long-lasting effects on the Gulf, its ecosystems, and the people who call it home. And many of those local residents who participated in the cleanup in the gulf, like after other large spills, reported harmful long-term health impacts.

I also remember the Deepwater Horizon spill. I was notified early in the morning that the rig was on fire and at risk of sinking. We had the first trajectory and oil fate model analysis within a few hours. The first of hundreds of such forecasts. I worked 16 hour days until the well was capped 87 days later. And the cleanup and damage assessment continued for years after that.

But those of us whose lives have been about responding to spills know it's the lesser-known spills as well, including those members of this Subcommittee have never heard of or have forgotten, that can disrupt coastal communities. I think of the Tampa Bay spill over 30 years ago, which was the result of the collision of three ships, and which provided the foundation for today's critical emergency response and damage assessment techniques. Despite emergency cleanup efforts, the oil fouled 13 miles of beaches and caused injury to birds, sea turtles, mangrove habitat, seagrasses, salt marshes, shellfish beds, as well as closing many of the waterways to fishing and boating.

Every year, NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration responds to over 150 oil and chemical spills in U.S. waters. Whenever and wherever you drill, produce, transport and store oil, there is risk, and this bill would dangerously expand those risks into new regions with limited ability to respond, particularly as agency budgets are being cut.

I'd like to specifically bring the Subcommittee's attention to what an oil spill in Alaska would mean if these areas were opened to oil and gas. At NOAA, I worked extensively on designing spill response alternatives for Alaska and was a signatory to a plan to use chemical dispersants if a major spill occurred. Not because this technique is favored, but rather based on the recognition that few other response technologies could be feasible in remote, ice-prone regions of the Arctic.

The North Slope region of Alaska is larger than many U.S. states but home to fewer than 10,000 residents, most of whom are scattered among dozens of isolated, small communities only accessible by air. The area is hundreds of miles from cities like Fairbanks and Anchorage and mobilizing the proper equipment can take weeks. Caring for the number of responders needed would be logistically impossible in the region or in other areas like the Bering Sea. While sea ice is diminishing in the region, the area is still subject to severe storms, long winter darkness, and other challenges that would severely complicate any cleanup response.

Even in accessible areas, mechanical cleanup of any large spill is highly unlikely. For example, during the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster, which was only 50 miles off the Gulf Coast and near the center of the oil and gas industry, only a fraction of the spilled oil was recovered, despite a response of more than 45,000 people at its peak and access to a stockpile of specialized underwater robotic vehicles, multiple drilling ships, spill response vessels, and other equipment.

Eliminating current and future ocean protections as laid out in Congressman Higgins' bill opens the door to oil and gas development on every coast, risking an oil spill that we won't be able to clean up that would cause decades of harm to coastal communities and sensitive marine environments.

Opposition to CORE Act of 2025

While not my specific area of expertise, I want to briefly touch on my concerns around the CORE Act of 2025. This bill would prioritize seismic testing and exploratory drilling even in ecologically sensitive areas, including marine sanctuaries that are currently protected. Seismic surveys involve repeated, high-decibel blasts of air guns that can travel hundreds of miles underwater, which can seriously impact marine wildlife and habitats. Opening previously protected areas to these activities introduces serious and obvious risks.

Risks of Offshore Drilling & Cuts to NOAA

In addition to the increased risk of oil spills, expanding offshore drilling threatens billion-dollar coastal economies, including fishing, tourism, and recreation, which together support millions of jobs.

Climate-fueled disasters are already hurting coastal communities, driving up insurance rates, and causing property losses. Last year was the hottest year on record, with at least 27 climate disasters costing the United States over $182 billion. Yet, this administration is moving to stop tracking the cost of these extreme weather disasters and Members of this committee just voted to repeal funding for coastal restoration and resilience in their reconciliation bill. I cannot imagine a worse time to open our coastlines to new exploration and drilling.

The risks to our ocean, coastal communities, and offshore workers are magnified by the Trump administration's rollback of safety regulations for fossil fuel projects, as well as the gutting of key federal agencies and programs that help clean up pollution from oil spills, like NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration. The administration has eliminated roughly 20% of NOAA's workforce through mass firings and early retirements, and aims to eliminate even more. The agency's critical work is being further degraded by contract cancellations and lapses stemming from Secretary Lutnick's freeze on contracts over $100,000 which has left scientists unable to conduct research.

We also know that the administration is seeking even more severe cuts that will further hinder our ability to prevent, monitor, and respond to future oil spills. Leaked documents and the President's FY26 budget propose a 75% reduction in funding to NOAA Research and a 27% cut to NOAA's overall budget. These dramatic staffing and agency budget cuts paired with safety rollbacks, mean fewer inspections, weaker spill prevention, and slower emergency responses.

As hurricane season rapidly approaches in just 12 days, the combination of reckless cuts and an expanded footprint for offshore drilling would spell disaster for our safety, health, and economies.

In closing, after more than three decades of responding to oil spills across the country, I've seen firsthand the major, and often irreparable, damage these spills cause, especially in sensitive and remote marine ecosystems. The Offshore Lands Authorities Act and the CORE Act ignore the voices of millions of Americans who want to see American coastlines protected from new drilling. They would increase the risk of catastrophic oil spills, including in areas with limited response capabilities, just as the very institutions we rely on to respond are being weakened by dramatic cuts to their budgets and workforce.

I respectfully urge the Subcommittee to consider these risks before moving forward with these two pieces of legislation. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MR. DOUG HELTON, FORMER REGIONAL OPERATIONS SUPERVISOR, EMERGENCY RESPONSE DIVISION, NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Questions Submitted by Representative Huffman

Chairman Stauber and Representative Huffman: Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee on this important issue and I appreciate the opportunity to share additional information for the record.

Question 1. This administration is pushing to open new areas of the Arctic Ocean to offshore oil and gas drilling. As an expert on oil spill response, what would an oil spill response in the Arctic actually look like in practice? What are the unique challenges to responding to a spill in that region, both environmental and logistical? Is full recovery a realistic possibility?

Answer. Oil spill response is always challenging, but a response in the Arctic would be especially so. The scale of the Alaskan North Slope is immense, extreme weather and long winters would hinder response efforts and the logistics are very limited. Getting equipment and personnel on scene and housing those personnel would be a huge challenge. The north slope region is over 2000 miles by sea from Kodiak AK and over 1500 miles from Dutch Harbor, Alaska.

Supplies and equipment could be brought in by air but there are few villages and a very limited road system. There are no harbors for large ships, and the coastal bays can only be navigated by landing craft, barges and shallow water vessels. The response would be slow and rely on equipment already staged in the region, with crews working from small vessels, helicopters and other small aircraft.

Response efforts would also be seasonal, with most of the effort during the summer months. The most challenging time of year would be during ice formation and breakup when little or no response actions would be feasible.

Full recovery of oil is never likely during a spill. Most major spills such as the *Exxon Valdez* and the Deepwater Horizon oil spills had only 5 to 10% recovered.

Question 2. What are the impacts of oil spills on fisheries, both commercial and subsistence?

Answer. The North Slope and coastal Alaskan Arctic has thousands of miles of environmentally sensitive coastline with long sand and gravel shorelines where oil could penetrate and biologically rich habitats such as marshes, sheltered tidal flats, and exposed tidal flats. The North Slope supports a number of sensitive biological resources including birds, fish and shellfish, and marine mammals. The local communities are heavily reliant on marine resources for their livelihood and subsistence. Because of this unique relationship with the marine environment, much of the coast is utilized for subsistence activities and is extremely sensitive to the impacts of marine commerce, especially oil spills.

Commercial fishing is less common in this region, but the broader commercial industry in Alaska could certainly be affected by a spill in this region. Many consumers would question the wholesomeness of Alaskan seafood in general without understanding the location in which their products are harvested. If a spill were to happen in the Bering Sea however impacts to the industry could be direct and enormous because many of the largest seafood ports in the United States are in this region.

Question 3. H.R. 513 and H.R. 2556 would facilitate offshore oil and gas drilling in long protected areas of the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf, including the Atlantic, Pacific, 27 Alaska, and the Eastern Gulf. While the more catastrophic potential impacts of oil spills were discussed during the hearing, oil and gas drilling also involves frequent smaller-scale spills. How common are small spills, and what effects do they have on ecosystems and coastal communities?

Answer. Large oil spills like the *Exxon Valdez* are fortunately rare but small spills are very common. The US Coast Guard gets around 6000 or so notifications a year annually of spills in US waters, and NOAA typically responds to 150 to 200 of the larger more complicated incidents. Offshore oil and gas development requires specialized vessels, tugs, barges crew boats, and other work boats and these annually contribute to a number of small spills. These vessels need to be fueled and maintained and the supporting port infrastructure, including refineries, tank farms and pipelines, all add to the risk of small operational spills. Cumulatively these small spills can be harmful to coastal ecosystems.

Question 4. Is there anything else you would like to add for the record?

Answer. Much of the focus of offshore oil and gas development is on the risks from exploration and production, but still responders also need to be prepared for transportation related incidents. A substantial fraction of the US crude oil production, as well as refined products, is exported. The great circle shipping routes for the West Coast and Alaska goes through the Aleutians to Asia.

In the near future, routes may go through the Arctic. These are remote areas with limited marine salvage and rescue capacity. Rescue tugs may be days or weeks away. Even a small mechanical breakdown of a tanker may quickly escalate into a major marine casualty.

Responders need to consider the likely shipping routes and the risks inherent in those routes.

In recent years, the U.S. has produced record amounts of oil offshore, and this administration wants to expand that. The proposed bills will increase production without recognition of the increased risk of spills. And we are going in the wrong direction.

Planning and preparedness for spills big and small has been substantially impaired with the recent cuts to NOAA budgets and staffing. The frequency and risk of spills has not declined, but NOAA's response team is now much smaller, with major gaps in coverage in California, Texas, and the Great Lakes. The remaining team is now facing contracting, hiring, budget, travel and procurement roadblocks that are making it harder to do the work. The team that remains, working even harder to fulfill the mission, is soon expecting to see further reductions in force.

Key contracts are not being renewed. Sooner or later, the public will feel this. These changes are seriously harming our national preparedness for managing oil spills.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you for your testimony.

The gentleman yields. Mr. Kief, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CORY KIEF, DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, CROSBY TUGS, LLC, GALLIANO, LOUISIANA

Mr. KIEF. Chairman Stauber, Mr. Ezell, Ranking Member Ansari, and all the Committee members in attendance today, it is an honor and privilege to come before you today. I am here today to share my thoughts on the recent bills to be introduced in the 119th Congress by Congressman Higgins and Congressman Hunt.

As I understand, these two bills would limit the executive authority of POTUS relative to cancellation of lease sales and better identify and evaluate what is available for development and production of natural resources in this great Nation.

Let me start by explaining the service industry that I represent. I am the Director of Business Development and Governmental Affairs for Crosby Tugs, located in Galliano, Louisiana. We provide marine towing services for the energy and civil sectors of the U.S. Our fleet of 130 vessels navigate the inland waters, rivers, gulfs, and oceans of this great Nation. We operate domestically and internationally. I have 49 years of experience in this industry and began my service as an ordinary seaman and worked through the ranks to become an executive in this field. I also serve in several civic capacities, as outlined in my biography.

My comments on Congressman Higgins's bill is that limiting the authority of POTUS to withdraw lands from leasing that are necessary for offshore production of energy is critical. The U.S. needs every electron, barrel of oil, foot of gas it can harvest to meet growing energy demands.

My comments on Congressman Hunt's bill are that there are so many regions in this Nation that are off limits which are vital to our Nation's goal for energy independence. I do believe that the last evaluations were done in some regions in the 1960s, which were incomplete and outdated. I am sure that new seismic technology today could help us better understand just exactly what is out there. I do believe that would be good to know.

Also, we have Canada to the north, Russia to the northwest, Mexico and Cuba to the south, maybe actively harvesting resources from our region that we should be harvesting.

These bills complement each other. The Offshore Lands Authorities Act makes sure lands are available for leasing for generations to come, and only the most sensitive areas can be withdrawn, and must be reconsidered every 20 years in order to be withdrawn again. No more permanent withdrawals.

The CORE Act looks at these areas and lets policymakers like Dr. Cruickshank here from BOEM know the resource potential so that when leasing occurs it can be directed in a strategic way. It is as simple as that.

Without the areas to lease, operations like those of Crosby Tugs and other vessel operators, rig workers, engineers, service companies, and others are in jeopardy of being phased out. Without resource assessments, the already dysfunctional Federal Government will be left to make decisions with even less information and outright outdated and inaccurate information.

Although these measures are important, in no way are they near enough to have a national energy policy that is substantial enough to attract investment. Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, you all may as well come to terms that the U.S. is simply not an attractive place to invest in the energy sector. This Nation must fix the permitting process, and we must do it for all energy sources and all infrastructure projects. Too much time is being wasted bickering about which sector of energy is better than the other, too much blame about who shut down oil and gas and who shut down renewables, when the fact is that all sectors of energy should be brought online. And that is what I said, all sectors of energy.

There is no place in the world that wakes up every morning demanding less energy. All regions of the world want more and more. There is a smart way to do it, but it seems that you haven't figured that out yet. If you don't figure it out soon, we will be forced to buy energy from some other places in the world who will capitalize on our weaknesses.

Did you know that the revenue generated for the U.S. Treasury by the sale of leases and royalties generated by the production of oil and gas was second only to Federal income taxes?

Millions of people depend on the energy sector for their jobs. They are negatively affected by government overreach, as well, all because our government can't get its act together. Thank goodness we have a Nation who wants energy independence, but the good people of this Nation don't have a government that we can depend on to make that happen.

The messaging is wrong, as well. It is insane to believe that renewables will replace fossil fuels, but we can bring another source of energy online that will help to satisfy the needs of energy, and we have done it in the past without sacrificing other energy inputs.

The political machine is hurting us. The world is watching and forming their own opinion about how great this Nation really is. I believe these bills are a step in the right direction to begin to get the U.S. back on track to have better energy policies, but this Committee and the Federal Government have much more work to do, as well. We deserve better. We are depending on you. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kief follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CORY KIEF

Good morning, Chairman Stauber, Ranking Member Ansari, and all of the committee members in attendance today. It is an honor and a privilege to come before you today!

I am here today to share my thought on the recent bills to be introduced in the 119th Congress by Congressman Clay Higgins (H.R. 513) and Congressman Wesley Hunt (H.R. 2556). As I understand, these two bills would limit the executive authority of POTUS relative to cancellations of lease sales, and to better identify and evaluate what is available for development and production of natural resources in this great nation.

Let me start by explaining the Service industry that I represent. I am the Director of Business Development and Governmental Affairs for Crosby Tugs located in Galliano, LA. We provide marine towing services for the energy and civil sectors of the U.S. Our fleet of 130 vessels navigate the inland waters, rivers, gulf and oceans of this great nation. We operate domestically and internationally. I have 49 years of experience in this industry and began my service as an ordinary seaman and worked through the ranks to become an executive in this field. I also serve in several civic capacities as outlined in my biography.

My comments on Congressman Higgins' bill are that limiting the authority of POTUS to withdraw lands from leasing, that are necessary for offshore production of energy, is critical. The U.S. needs every electron, barrel of oil, or foot of gas it can harvest to meet growing energy demands.

My comments on Congressman Hunts' bill are that there are so many regions in this nation that are off limits which are vital to our nation's goal for energy independence. I do believe that the last evaluations were done, in some regions, in the 1960's which are incomplete and outdated. I'm sure that new seismic technology today could help to better understand just exactly what is out there. I do believe that would be good to know! Also, Canada to the North, Russia to the Northwest, Mexico and Cuba to the south may be actively harvesting resources from our regions that WE should be harvesting.

These bills complement each other. The Offshore Lands Authorizes Act makes sure lands are available for leasing for generations to come and only the most sensitive areas can be withdrawn and must be reconsidered every 20 years in order to be withdrawn again. No more permanent withdraws. The CORE Act looks at these areas and lets policy makers, like Dr. Cruickshank here from BOEM, know the resource potential, so that when leasing occurs it can be directed in a strategic way. It's as simple as that.

Without areas to lease, operations like those of Crosby Tugs and many other vessel operators, rig workers, engineers, service companies and others are in jeopardy of being phased out. Without resource assessments, the already dysfunctional federal government will be left to make decisions with even less information, and outright outdated and inaccurate information.

Although these measures are important, in no way are they near enough to have a national energy policy that is substantial enough to attract investment. Mr. Chairman and Ranking member, you all may as well come to terms that the U.S. is simply NOT an attractive place to invest in the energy sector. This nation must fix the permitting processes and we must do it for all energy sources and all infrastructure projects. Too much time is being wasted bickering about which sector of energy is better than the other. Too much blame about who shut down Oil and Gas, and who shut down renewables. When the fact is that ALL sectors of energy should be brought on line. That's right . . . I said ALL!

There is no place in the world that wakes up every morning demanding less energy. ALL regions of the world want more, and more. There is a smart way to do it, but it seems that you haven't figured that out yet. If you don't figure it out soon, we will be forced to buy energy from some other places in the world who will capitalize on our weaknesses.

Did you know that the revenue generated for the U.S. Treasury by the sale of leases and royalties generated by the production of Oil and Gas was second only to Federal Income taxes? Millions of people who depend on the energy sector for jobs. They are negatively affected by government overreach as well, all because our government can't get its act together. Thank goodness we have a nation who wants energy independence, but the good people of this nation don't have a government that we can depend on to make that happen.

As my grandmother used to say . . . Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die. Everybody wants to lose weight, but nobody wants to stop eating and start exercising.

The messaging is wrong as well. It is insane to believe that renewables will replace fossil fuels. But we can bring another source of energy on line that will help to satisfy the need for energy and we've done it in the past without sacrificing other energy inputs. The political machine is hurling us. The world is watching and forming their own opinion about how great this nation really is.

I believe these bills are a step in the right direction to begin to get the U.S. back on track to have better energy policies but this committee and the federal government has more work to do as well.

We deserve better. Thank You!

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Mr. Kief. The Committee will now recognize members for 5 minutes for questioning, and I now recognize myself for 5 minutes. I will start with you, Mr. Kief.

Is it true that the current mobile offshore drilling rig count in the United States has drastically declined in the last 20 years, and cannot in reality support a drill, drill, drill program?

Mr. KIEF. That is correct, sir.

Mr. EZELL. Why is that? And can anything be done about it?

Mr. KIEF. Well, I am going to read to you my past testimony from 2011 that I did before the Committee on Natural Resources when Chairman Hastings was here. "Drilling contractors are leaving the Gulf to go to work in other countries that have the ability to obtain steady financial commitments. These drilling contractors have already demonstrated they will not stay in the U.S. waiting for the government and the operators to get their act together and iron out the wrinkles in this new regulatory environment. Service companies such as ours, who depend on this system, are now facing severe economic decline due to this lack of efficiency."

We just can't simply get our act together to figure out how to compete with the rest of the world. Bottom line.

Mr. EZELL. Mr. Kief, the CORE Act and Offshore Lands Authorities Act, OLAA, are both critical bills to realize an American energy dominance for the future, but especially important for coastal communities. As you well know, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi are recipients of GOMESA funding paid directly as a percentage of offshore oil and gas receipts. Do you think that both bills will ensure that Gulf States realize funds for generations to come since OLAA identifies more resources that can be produced and the other, prevents these resources from being taken off the books?

Mr. KIEF. I certainly do believe that the coastal States are depending on that revenue that is generated from royalties and from production. The problem that we have is constantly we address Congress, and everybody wants to talk about production,

production, production, production. What we are missing is exploration and development.

I built a small business by reading lease sales. And you know what the lease sales for the last 10 years tells me? This is not a good place. And what is in jeopardy is our revenue that is being generated from GOMESA or GOAESA, whatever you want to call it now.

But the point is that Louisiana has constitutionally protected that money that we spend on coastal protection and restoration only. I am the President of our local levee district. We depend on that funding to build a resiliency for our people who live along the coast.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you. I want to give you another minute to speak about the importance of GOMESA. And I understand you are involved with public infrastructure in Louisiana, as well.

Mr. KIEF. Yes, sir. I am the President of the Association of Levee Boards for the great State of Louisiana. I'm proud of that.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you very much.

I now recognize Ms. Ansari for 5 minutes.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you.

I want to thank you, Mr. Phipps, for attending our hearing today. I do believe there is some important context that is missing from our discussion of this bill and the expansion of your Bull Mountains mine.

First, I would like to enter into the record this New York Times expose titled, "A Faked Kidnaping and Cocaine: a Montana Mine's Descent Into Chaos."

For those who aren't familiar, this expose is written about your coal company, Signal Peaks, and details some extremely concerning behavior from previous executives. Mr. Phipps, yes or no, is it true that nine executives of Signal Peak Energy have been convicted or charged as part of a scheme involving embezzlement, bribery, and a faked kidnaping?

Mr. PHIPPS. That was prior to my time, and I don't believe it was nine.

Ms. ANSARI. Say yes or no.

Mr. PHIPPS. That is my answer.

Ms. ANSARI. All right, it is a yes. Is it true that a former Vice President of Signal Peak pressured, bribed, and threatened workers not to report injuries that they suffered on the job?

Mr. PHIPPS. That was before my time at Signal Peak Energy.

Ms. ANSARI. Is it true?

Mr. PHIPPS. The owners of Signal Peak Energy did the right thing when they found out about this behavior. They cooperated——

Ms. ANSARI. It is a yes or no——

Mr. PHIPPS [continuing]. With authorities.

Ms. ANSARI. Mr. Phipps, it is a yes-or-no question.

Mr. PHIPPS. This was before my time.

Ms. ANSARI. All right. It is a yes. And three, is it true that a United States attorney stated that Signal Peak's actions demonstrate "utter disregard for environmental and worker health and safety standards"?

Mr. PHIPPS. No, Signal Peak currently complies with all Federal and State laws.

Ms. ANSARI. Is it true that a United States Attorney stated that this happened? Yes or no.

Mr. PHIPPS. Prior to my time, I don't know.

Ms. ANSARI. It is kind of bizarre that you don't know much about your company prior to your time, but Signal Peak was fined $1 million and sentenced to 3 years of probation for violating environmental and safety regulations. This is the kind of company that Republicans want to sell off our Federal lands to without proper review, especially of the climate impacts. Frankly, I think that is a disgrace and the American people deserve better.

Mr. Helton, I want to thank you for your many years of Federal service. Congratulations on your retirement. Thank you for taking the time to be here today.

The bills on today's agenda are part of a significant action to expand fossil fuel development, especially offshore drilling, across Federal lands and waters, all under the guise of a so-called energy emergency. But the United States, as you know, is the largest producer of oil and gas in the world. We are producing more than any other country in history. We are also a top exporter, which does increase our energy costs here at home. Interestingly, all of the coal from the coal mine I was just asking about is exported to Japan and Singapore.

Mr. Helton, if we significantly expand offshore oil and gas, especially in places like Alaska, where is that oil most likely to go, and what are the risks of transporting that oil and gas, if it might, for example, head west to Asia?

Mr. HELTON. Thank you for the question. I am not sure exactly how the oil will be transported or where, but my suspicion is that much of the oil will be exported, especially from Alaska. There aren't the routes of transmission to get the oil from the Chukchi Sea and Beaufort Sea currently to the Alaska Pipeline. And even if it gets into the pipeline system, it is a chance that a substantial amount of that would be heading west to Japan and Korea and other Asian locations. And from my perspective and concern, is that there is very little response capacity in that region.

So historically, tankers would leave Valdez and head down to California or Washington ports. Along the way there is plenty of assets and rescue tugs and equipment if a vessel gets in trouble. But if a vessel heads west to the Aleutians, it is unlikely that there is going to be a rapid response, and a simple mechanical problem could lead to a catastrophic incident.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you so much.

I yield back to the Chairman.

Mr. STAUBER [presiding]. Representative Downing, you are up for 5 minutes.

Mr. DOWNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will just jump right into it, a question first for Mr. Phipps.

Can you start by explaining the long history of the Bull Mountains mine, and how it has contributed to the region's economy over the years?

Mr. PHIPPS. So, mining in the Bull Mountains has occurred for over 150 years. Signal Peak Energy commercially developed the property in 2008 and invested hundreds of millions of dollars to bring rail service to the mine and big power that is required for a commercial operation. And with that, they brought a longwall operation to produce coal domestically for power plants in the U.S. And as market forces changed and the need for domestic coal dropped, Signal Peak began exporting coal, and now 98 percent of our production is exported to Japan and South Korea.

Mr. DOWNING. Thank you. Signal Peak has made significant contributions to the community in Musselshell County and beyond. Can you speak to what is at stake for local schools, public services, and charitable programs if the mine were to close?

Mr. PHIPPS. In addition to the extractive taxes and royalties that we pay, we also contribute to Musselshell and Yellowstone County. Signal Peak has a community foundation where we donate millions of dollars to the community that can go to anything from fire trucks to playgrounds for kids and youth baseball. We also have an endowment where we award scholarships to any student from Musselshell County that wants to do secondary education. And then we have also done a large project recently in Yellowstone County, where we have made the largest donation to the City of Billings to construct an ice rink for the community.

Mr. DOWNING. Thank you. You know, the Federal sections are relatively small here, so why is access to this small area of Federal coal so critical right now?

And what would happen to the mine's operations and workforce if H.R. 931 was not enacted?

Mr. PHIPPS. We have enough coal reserves to remain operational through the end of the year. Our mine is shovel-ready, ready to deploy our longwall into this Federal coal at the end of the year. But we also have to develop ahead of the longwall with our continuous miner units. So, we will begin winding operations down at the end of the year if we don't receive approval to mine.

Mr. DOWNING. So, what does that mean to workforce? How many jobs are lost? What happens there?

Mr. PHIPPS. It would probably be 85 percent of our workforce.

Mr. DOWNING. Thanks. Some of the language was included in the reconciliation package the Committee has advanced. So why do you believe it is still necessary to move H.R. 931 as a standalone bill?

Mr. PHIPPS. When we were in front of Judge Molloy on this case, OSM represented to the court that they could have the EIS completed by July 2024. We were asked if the operation could remain open during that time, and our answer to the court was we could remain open, however it had to be done on time. Well, that case has since closed, and now OSM has failed to meet their end of the deal, and we are stuck holding the bag and have nowhere else to mine.

Mr. DOWNING. Thank you.

Just in closing, obviously this operation is important to Musselshell County, it is important to Yellowstone County, it is important to the State of Montana. It is supporting schools, charities, families. These are high-paying jobs that are spending money in these communities. This is incredibly important. And my understanding is, if operations have to stop at these Federal sections, that a lot of this coal will be essentially sterilized and unrecoverable, at least not economically. So, I just want to point out how important this is to the communities that I represent and to the State of Montana.

So, on that, Mr. Chair, I yield.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much. The Chair now recognizes Representative Rivas from California's 29th for 5 minutes.

Ms. RIVAS. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am glad to see the bipartisan reauthorization for the National Landslide Preparedness Program, the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program, and the Volcano Early Warning System Program, all on today's agenda. These programs provide critical services to our constituents and help us better understand national disasters so we can mitigate risks and prepare in advance.

This is especially relevant for my constituents in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles who are at risk of experiencing earthquakes and landslides. Just over 30 years ago the Northridge earthquake devastated the San Fernando Valley, killing 58 people, injuring 9,000, and displacing 125,000 residents.

Dr. West, can you describe how the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program can help us both mitigate and respond to disasters like the Northridge earthquake?

Dr. WEST. Let's try this. I can. I think the, in my testimony I called out the four agencies that participate in NEHRP. I think they provide a nice outline for the different components of your question.

At the foundational research level, you have the National Science Foundation working to advance our core understanding of, quite honestly, how earthquakes happen. And on the engineering side, doing the research to figure out how buildings respond, how structures respond to different kinds of forces.

Then you have the U.S. Geological Survey, who is kind of the eyes on the ground of earthquakes, so tracking and understanding what is actually happening, as I showed in my figure, mapping out what we might expect in the future.

Then you have FEMA, who contributes not only on the recovery side, the response and recovery side that we are all very familiar with, but also on the mitigation side. So, working with communities, working with cities to identify specific future hazards and address risks and address them.

Then you have the National Institute of Standards and Technology, who really takes a lead in coordinating those groups, but also in translating those things into building codes.

So all of those pieces come together, I think, to reduce the risks from earthquakes.

Ms. RIVAS. Thank you. You know, I agree with you. It is clear that these programs do work, and it is important to continue investing, especially in science research at NSF and other Federal agencies. You know, in California, we have Caltech in Southern California that is known for earthquake research. And, you know, I have worked there years ago and met many scientists and engineers that work in this field and, very important, especially for Southern California that is always at risk for earthquakes, especially in my district.

But, you know, I am concerned that staff firings across the Federal Government because of DOGE will threaten these services and the safety and preparedness of our communities. We are already seeing changes to our emergency alert system, you know, thanks to these DOGE firings at NOAA which plays a key role in safeguarding our communities from natural disasters before and after they strike. In fact, the National Weather Service is no longer providing weather alerts in languages other than English. And this is another attack from the Administration towards non-English speakers in this country. We need everyone in our communities to be safe and to know what to do in the event of a natural disaster.

You know, in my district, almost 70 percent of households report speaking a non-English language as their primary language, and, you know, what will my constituents do in the next earthquake or landslide, or if they don't get the emergency alerts in a language that they read and understand?

And so, Mr. Helton, I know we have very little time, but can you describe how DOGE's firings affect the agency's ability to provide similar critical services?

Mr. HELTON. Yes, the cuts to NOAA are across the agency and all the divisions. Like you mentioned, the National Weather Service has been cut. I know in the concept, in the relationship with the oil spill world, there is talk about expanding drilling in the Arctic, for example, but the Weather Service is no longer offering 24-hour weather forecasts in the northern region of Alaska. So that is an example where those models and data would be critical for any kind of operational response and to model where that oil might go.

Similarly, the IOOS system, which is the International Ocean Observing System, apparently is also slated to be defunded, a critical data source that oil spill modelers would use to predict where contaminants would spread and how rapidly they would get there.

So, that is just a small snapshot. I think every part of NOAA has seen substantial cuts.

Ms. RIVAS. Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much. I will now recognize Representative Hageman for 5 minutes.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Kief, what was the reaction in your State, in the Gulf of America, and in your industry when President Biden issued an order to withdraw the 600-plus million acres?

Mr. KIEF. Well, as I mentioned before, the way we plan our business is based on these things. Robust lease sales usually mean that we can make good investments into growing our businesses and things of that nature. Those things are just an economical turn-off. I mean, now, what are we looking at? And when we see these things, we realize that our investment is not dead. You know, we have millions of dollars invested into equipment and people and services. And when those things happen, what are we supposed to do with our investment? And we are depending on these things for us to have a viable business.

Ms. HAGEMAN. And actually produce something that the rest of us need, correct?

Mr. KIEF. Well, as I mentioned before in my testimony, I don't know anywhere in the world where you wake up and people demand less energy. Everybody wants more and more and more energy, and we should be working every day to figure out how to produce those things in a responsible way.

Ms. HAGEMAN. We are using more energy today than we used yesterday, and tomorrow we will use more energy than we use today. That is just the reality of the situation, isn't it?

Mr. KIEF. My—the study that I have been doing shows that by the year 2050 that we are going to have a demand that is going to increase by 50 percent.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. Luckily, because of the change to President Trump's pro-energy agenda, this withdrawal that President Biden attempted to do was reversed 14 days later, so it was only in place for a short period of time. In that period of time, did your industry suffer any harm as a result of the withdrawal?

Mr. KIEF. Could you repeat that again, please? I am sorry.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Sure. Did you suffer any harm during the 14-day withdrawal that withdrawal was in place under President Biden?

Mr. KIEF. Not really, because those impacts aren't felt immediately.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, one of the things that we hear of ten with energy producers is the word "certainty," and how important certainty is in your industry. Why is certainty important, Mr. Kief?

Mr. KIEF. Well, because it is the only way that you can attract investment. I mean, and it is not just with us, what we do as a service industry with a tugboat company. These operators in the Gulf of Mexico, they have to decide where they are going to make capital investments if they are larger oil companies. The smaller independents, they need to go and find investment capital and money. And when these things happen, they just can't get, you know, attract investment. And it is just a wet towel on everything.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Mr. Phipps, is certainly important for your industry?

Mr. PHIPPS. Yes, it is. And——

Ms. HAGEMAN. Why?

Mr. PHIPPS. Blue collar workers are attracted in all industries. And when you work at a coal mine and there is uncertainty on your permitting or whether or not you are going to have a job in a year, you are being recruited to go work elsewhere. And so, with us not being able to provide certainty to our workforce, it has been difficult to retain top talent.

Ms. HAGEMAN. So, one of the things that I heard earlier today is that the so-called renewables are less expensive and as reliable as our energy that is produced with coal, natural gas, and uranium. And I see, Mr. Kief, that you are shaking your head. I find it to be absolutely, utterly, and completely 100 percent absurd for anybody to make that claim, and I am just going to give you a quick example of what I mean by that.

I was recently on the ninth floor of a power plant near Colorado Springs, and I was looking around and I looked across the highway I–25 and I saw a solar farm over there. And so, I was asking the manager of the facility where I was touring, and I said, "What is the footprint here? About how big is this place? It looks to me to be about 300 acres."

And he said, "Yes, probably about 300 acres."

I said, "How about across the road? How about—how big is that solar farm?"

And he said, "About 1,500 acres," so 5 times larger.

And I said, "What is the output?"

And he said, "Two hundred megawatts here."

I said, "How much over there?"

He said, "A hundred and fifty."

I said, "What is your efficiency here?"

And he said, "Eighty-two to eighty-five percent."

I said, "What is the efficiency over there?"

And he said, "Twenty-two percent." So when you just look at that one metric by which the amount of land necessary per unit of energy produced, they are not even comparable.

The other thing that is so crazy about it is when you talk about solar. For 8 to 10 hours every day solar power has a catastrophic failure, a catastrophic failure because the sun goes down, right? For 8 to 10 hours every single day it can't produce electricity. And yet we have people who attack what you do, Mr. Kief, and what you do, Mr. Phipps, and attempt to prevent us from being able to access these resources with the idea that we are going to be able to replace that energy with wind and solar. Is that at all feasible, Mr. Phipps?

Mr. PHIPPS. No, it is not.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Mr. Kief?

Mr. KIEF. No, it is not, but it is still important that we bring all sources of energy online in some kind of way.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Sure, but it is also important that we protect the ones that we already have that are powered with our traditional energy resources, correct?

Mr. KIEF. That is correct.

Ms. HAGEMAN. All right. Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. STAUBER. The Chair now recognizes Representative Crank for 5 minutes.

Mr. CRANK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for joining us today.

In 2023 Congress passed the most significant permitting reform in over 40 years through the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the FRA. This legislation shortened review times, limited what qualifies as a major Federal action, and it codified the One Federal Decision framework.

A central goal of these reforms was to provide greater certainty and greater timeliness for project applicants, ensuring agencies arrive at decisions without unnecessary delays. FRA clarified that the 2-year shot clock, if you will, for completing an environmental impact statement begins when an agency determines that an EIS is required for a proposed Federal action. Any extension beyond that timeline must be done "in consultation with the applicant," ensuring agencies don't unilaterally drag out the process.

Mr. Phipps, despite exceeding the 2-year deadline for the EIS, did the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement consult with Signal Peak in good faith when it extended the EIS schedule to 2026?

Mr. PHIPPS. No, they did not.

Mr. CRANK. In your testimony, you mentioned that OSM undertook additional studies during the EIS process, and despite FRA making clear that agencies are not required to conduct such studies unless they are truly necessary. In your view, did OSM use these additional studies as a means to delay the issuance of the EIS?

Mr. PHIPPS. Yes, I believe they did.

Mr. CRANK. And then finally, I want to touch on the legal challenges. The D.C. District Court dismissed your suit, saying that it wasn't ripe because the original 2024 deadline hadn't passed yet, even though the agency had already amended its timeline to 2026. Do you believe Congress should revisit this issue in future permitting reform efforts?

Mr. PHIPPS. Yes, I think that would be helpful for operators. It is like getting your mid-term report when you are failing your class and you say, let's wait until the end of the semester to see if I really fail, rather than changing course, because OSM did not change course.

Mr. CRANK. And then, specific to that, should project applicants be allowed to challenge unreasonable delays before the deadline is passed, especially when an agency publicly revises those timelines?

Mr. PHIPPS. Yes, I think they should be.

Mr. CRANK. OK, thank you.

Mr. West, the National Landslide Preparedness Act additionally reauthorizes the 3D Elevation Program, also known as 3DEP, a complete topographical map of the U.S. that is important in not only landslide preparedness, but flood mapping, forestry, and infrastructure planning, as well. As the State geologist from Alaska, do you see 3DEP as playing an essential role potentially in combination with other programs such as Earth MRI at USGS to help identify mineral deposits?

Dr. WEST. Absolutely. Two different pieces there, landslides and mineral deposits, and 3DEP has proven tremendously valuable in landslides basically happen where we have steep terrain, right? That is a prerequisite. And the 3DEP program has made it possible to map vast areas and to unleash, you know, algorithms, computer technologies to identify those areas that are most likely and most prone to landsliding.

So, what they really do is allow you to move from kind of one person in the field doing field investigations to covering large areas. And the same analogy, I think, holds for mineral exploration.

Mr. CRANK. I hope I am not stealing questions from my colleague, Mr. Begich, but do you have any, examples of that in Alaska, where that has happened, or where you have used 3DEP?

Dr. WEST. You know, I am a seismologist. I can't comment on exactly which data sets were used, but the USGS has just recently completed a widespread survey of landslide risk around the Prince William Sound area, which was premised very heavily on topographic data sets. I am not in a position to know whether or not 3DEP, which portions of that were 3DEP-informed. I would be happy to follow up.

Mr. CRANK. OK, that is fine. No, I appreciate that, and thank you for your answers.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much. I will now recognize Representative Begich from the great State of Alaska for 5 minutes.

Mr. BEGICH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, before I begin I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a letter addressed to the Chair and Ranking Member of this Committee signed by over 460 individuals, including leading experts in earthquake and volcano science engineers and members of the private sector expressing support for the reauthorization of the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program and the National Volcano Early Warning System.

Mr. STAUBER. Without objection.

[The letter follows:]

Dear Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Huffman,

Historian Will Durant wrote that "civilization exists by geological consent, subject to change without notice". Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions threaten much of the United States from the Pacific Northwest to the Mississippi Valley, and from California to Alaska. Great earthquakes in the U.S. are rare but devastating, with their long term cost averaging $14.7 Billion per year[1]. The total cost of buildings exposed to earthquake risk for the nation is approximately $107.8 trillion. While we cannot prevent earthquakes or release the pressure in magma chambers, we can employ state of the art technology and decades of investment in research to forecast and reduce the risk from these inevitable events. Indeed, thanks to past congressional support for the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) and National Volcano Early Warning System (NVEWS) we have made great strides in quantifying risk from natural hazards and designing resilient buildings and infrastructure.

We are writing to urge continued support of the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) and the National Volcano Early Warning System (NVEWS), as vital elements for national safety, preparedness, and national security. Studies show that every $1 spent on earthquake mitigation efforts equals $11 saved in response and rebuilding costs[2].

The Threat

Earthquake and volcanic hazards are a nationwide problem: 230 million Americans live in regions where strong to violent shaking is possible, with 82 million buildings at risk from earthquake damage[1]. It is in America's strategic national interest to minimize damage to military bases, airfields, ports, or other facilities that could jeopardize national security.

The 2011 Magnitude-9 Tohoku, Japan earthquake and tsunami serve as a stark warning of potential devastation in the Pacific Northwest from a great Cascadia subduction zone event. The Tohoku event left 20,000 dead and $360B in economic losses. A similar tsunami inundated the Oregon-Washington coast in AD 1700, and could strike again. But thanks to NEHRP, the west coast is guarded by a tsunami warning system that will provide a precious few tens of minutes of warning to the coastal population.

The Hayward fault, which runs through the city of Oakland, California, and other East Bay communities is another disaster in waiting. A magnitude-7.0 earthquake on the Hayward fault is estimated to kill over 800 people and injure 18,000, with economic losses exceeding $44B[3]. Geologic research reveals that major earthquakes on the Hayward fault occur 150 years on average, with its last major quake 157 years ago.

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[1] FEMA, 2023, Hazus Estimated Annualized Earthquake Losses for the United States, FEMA 366, Washington, D.C., https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_p-366-hazus-estimated-annualized-earthquake-losses-united-states.pdf

[2] https://www.nibs.org/files/pdfs/ms_v4_overview.pdf

[3] https://www.usgs.gov/programs/science-application-for-risk-reduction/science/haywired-scenario#publications

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD018.pdf

Mr. BEGICH. Thank you.

Dr. West, with over 50 active volcanoes in Alaska, many directly beneath major air traffic corridors, do you believe the Federal Government has appropriately prioritized volcanic risk in its hazard mitigation strategy?

And as a follow-up, what role does the reauthorization of NVEWS play in ensuring aviation safety and economic continuity for both Alaska and the broader U.S. economy?

Dr. WEST. In my opinion, the previous iterations of NVEWS, which date back, oh, I don't know, I don't remember the first year, I want to say the early aught, actually demonstrates Congress's recognition of the problem. There is, of course, more work to be done. We have not completed the full build-out, the full suite of tools that would be available under NVEWS, but I think it would be wrong to, I certainly wouldn't want to suggest that it is a hazard that has been ignored.

Mr. BEGICH. And do you believe that the NVEWS work products help to ensure aviation safety and economic continuity?

And can you speak to that as it relates specifically to Alaska?

Dr. WEST. Without a doubt is the short answer. And, you know, the long answer is the ability to forecast where ash might occur in the air is pivotal in identifying regions where planes shouldn't be flying, where we might want to avoid. But also, when eruptions occur, a lot of things happen very, very quickly, right? All of a sudden there wasn't ash in the air, and now there is a huge area that is. So, putting that together with weather patterns and understanding where that ash is going to go, I live in Fairbanks, hundreds of miles north of the Aleutians, and we have flight routes impacted by ash. So those products are tremendously valuable.

I might have strayed from your question.

Mr. BEGICH. No, that is great, and I think it is worth mentioning just for the benefit of others and for the Committee, Alaska has one of the busiest cargo airports in the world. I believe we are number three right now in terms of cargo air traffic in Anchorage. Many of the flights that originate on the West Coast going to Asia fly directly over Alaska on the great circle route. So, it is absolutely important that we have this capacity, and it is a funded capacity.

You noted that real-time monitoring not only saves lives, but significantly reduces economic costs after disasters. In Alaska that is especially important because of our distance from supply chains and other emergency services. Can you speak to how programs like the NEHRP and NVEWS, as reauthorized by these bills, can help Alaska prepare more effectively for both earthquakes and volcanic events, and reduce long-term infrastructure repair costs?

Dr. WEST. Yes. In 2018 there was a magnitude 7.1 earthquake essentially underneath Anchorage. It did tremendous damage. Hundreds and hundreds of buildings experienced some damage. There were schools that were closed permanently. However, not a single building collapsed in its entirety. And remarkably, there were no fatalities. That was not an accident. That was because of construction practices over the course of decades that were informed by the building codes which are a direct product of NEHRP.

So, while that is a damaging event and we are never going to make all impacts of earthquakes go away, I think that is a remarkable success story.

Mr. BEGICH. I was in that earthquake. It was remarkable. It was extraordinarily powerful because of its proximity to Anchorage, and my house still stands. So, thank you for your work.

And I yield the balance of my time.

Mr. STAUBER. Representative Ansari.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you, Chairman. I would like to ask unanimous consent to enter into the record this letter from a coalition of 22 organizations opposing H.R. 2556, the CORE Act.

[The letter follows:]

May 19, 2025

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

Re: Legislative Hearing on H.R. 2556 (Rep. Hunt of TX), "Comprehensive Offshore Resource Enhancement Act of 2025"

Dear House Natural Resources Chair Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Natural Resources Committee,

We write to you with serious concerns about H.R. 2556 and the impact it would have on marine wildlife, marine protected areas, and our ocean and climate writ large. The Comprehensive Offshore Resource Enhancement Act of 2025 (the "CORE Act") is a cynical giveaway to the oil and gas and seismic industry draped in the rhetoric of national security.

Section 2(b) would prioritize "advanced geophysical, geological, and geotechnical methods" – a category that would include seismic testing and exploratory drilling – to assess transboundary oil and gas reserves; and to utilize "any existing maritime vessels or deployed capacity" in doing so. On the face of this provision, the areas to be explored would encompass regions, like New England and Southern California, that are deeply opposed to oil and gas development off their shores. Perhaps most alarmingly, the bill seeks to explore opening up our National Marine Sanctuaries – some of America's most unique and special ocean places – for future oil and gas development and other extractive uses. This prospect alone is highly concerning as it undermines a longstanding precedent of withdrawing marine sanctuaries from oil and gas leasing.

Section 2(c) of the CORE Act would revive the outer continental shelf (OCS) inventory provision of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. This would require the Interior Secretary to "conduct an inventory and analysis of oil and natural gas resources" beneath the entire United States OCS, using seismic testing and other methods. This mandate would include states, like those along the west coast, mid-Atlantic, and southeast, that have made their opposition clear to both seismic blasting and drilling. It would also include the OCS areas that have been withdrawn from future oil and gas drilling by various administrations. This could mean a sizable giveaway to industry, in which American taxpayers fund seismic prospecting off our coasts.

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD008.pdf

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I would also like to enter letters in support of Biden's permanent protections against offshore drilling in the Atlantic, Pacific, eastern Gulf, and Alaska's northern Bering Sea. These include letters from the House, Senate, Business Alliances for Coastal Protection, the

Defense Support Initiatives Committee, and 197 national and local non-governmental organizations.

[The letters follow:]

BAPPC
BUSINESS ALLIANCE FOR PROTECTING THE PACIFIC COAST

BAPAC
BUSINESS ALLIANCE FOR PROTECTING THE ATLANTIC COAST

FLORIDA GCBC
GULF COAST BUSINESS COALITION

July 30, 2024

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We represent over 55,000 coastal businesses and 500,000 fishing families along the Pacific, Atlantic, and Florida Gulf Coasts that generate billions of dollars in annual economic activity throughout the country. Our members understand that dirty and dangerous offshore drilling directly threatens the marine ecosystems they rely on. That same drilling also worsens climate change which brings growing risks to the health and livelihoods of our communities every year. We know we need to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and safeguard our coastlines and ocean economies for generations to come. We are writing to request bold action from President Biden through permanent protections of the entire Atlantic Coast and Eastern Gulf of Mexico, nearly half a million square miles of coast from Maine to Florida, from future offshore drilling.

Since February 2018, the Business Alliance for Protecting the Pacific Coast (BAPPC), Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast (BAPAC) and the Florida Gulf Coast Business Coalition (FGCBC) have served as the leading business voices opposing new and expanded oil and gas development off our coasts. Our alliances helped facilitate the broad, deep, and bipartisan opposition to offshore drilling over the last decade. From elected officials, concerned citizens, the military, and, of course, tens of thousands of coastal business owners. Together, we advocated for the current 10-year moratorium put in place under the Trump administration that withdraws the Atlantic coast from, North Carolina to Florida, from drilling. The U.S. is producing more oil than any country in the world, and the oil industry already has more than 2,000 offshore drilling leases in U.S. waters totaling over 13 million acres of ocean. A jaw-dropping 80% of this ocean acreage sits totally idle[i]. *We don't need any more*. Now, we are urgently seeking a permanent extension of existing protections up and down the Coast, along with the Eastern Gulf of Mexico.

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD007.pdf

DEFENSE SUPPORT INITIATIVES COMMITTEE
OKALOOSA, SANTA ROSA AND WALTON COUNTIES

JULY 30, 2024

MEMORANDUM, SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: EASTERN GULF TEST & TRAINING RANGE PROTECTION

The Defense Support Initiatives Committee is a long-standing successful military advocacy group located in Okaloosa County in Northwest Florida. As the largest military test and training range in the continental United States, we understand the importance of the eastern Gulf of Mexico for both our national security and the coastal way of life in Florida. The Eastern Gulf Test and Training Range is utilized by all military services and plays a vital role in our national security—accommodating water-to-land transitions, high-altitude supersonic air combat training, air-to-air missile testing, air-to-ground targeting, drone targeting, hypersonic weapons testing, space launches, and other activities. The EGTTR is vital for testing the next generation of air armaments, and for training in realistic combat-surrogate conditions.

The DSI is concerned with the threat of expanded offshore oil drilling. Totaling 180,000 square miles of Department of Defense controlled airspace, the EGTTR provides more uninterrupted surface and airspace than all other ranges in the lower 48 combined. Its size and strategic placement creates a critical military asset that cannot be replicated anywhere else. No other area in our nation offers the same combination of unrestricted space, land-water contrast, and adjacent support infrastructure.

It is these very characteristics that prompted Congress to originally protect the Eastern Gulf of Mexico from offshore drilling encroachment. Additionally, common sense suggests that we should not be extracting and transporting highly flammable products alongside live fire, munitions testing, or missile shooting. Similarly, we shouldn't be constructing immovable oil or wind infrastructure in areas used for underwater mine warfare training and countermeasure operations.

The 96th Test Wing, Eglin Air Force Base in Okaloosa County is the Air Force's test and evaluation organization for air-delivered weapons, navigation and guidance systems, Command and Control systems, and AF Special Operations Command systems. The wing provides expert development and evaluation of the systems throughout their lifecycle to ensure warfighters have technologically superior, sustainable and safe systems. In 2022, Team Eglin's economic impact was over $9.2 Billion; while Florida's military economic impact was over $96.6 Billion. If military access to the Gulf Range dwindles, not only is our national security threatened but Florida loses its standing as a prime location for military installations and the resultant defense industry.

Simply put, offshore drilling activities and military missions are not compatible. While a 2020 Presidential Executive Order currently protects this national asset, the environment, and the tourism and defense industries, an Executive Order can be overturned. Therefore, permanent protections are required. The Administration must renew its commitment to protect the military's Gulf Test and Training Range. Our national security depends on it.

Under Section 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, the President can permanently withdraw areas of the U.S. from development of future offshore drilling. We strongly request and encourage this permanent protection of the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey R. Riemer, Maj Gen USAF Ret.
Chairman

Kay Rasmussen, CEcD
Manager

A Great American Defense Community
Post Office Box 4097, Fort Walton Beach, FL 32549
850-362-6467, www.militaryfriendlynwf.com

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD009.pdf

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 15, 2024

President Joseph R. Biden

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC, 20500

President Biden:

Since day one, you have delivered on your commitment to take the bold, transformative action we need to address the climate crisis and chart a path toward a safer, cleaner energy future for all Americans. Through historic investments in the Inflation Reduction Act, Infrastructure Law, and CHIPS and Science Act, the United States has become a global leader in the fight against climate change, all while boosting our economy with billions of dollars in private sector investments and hundreds of thousands of good-paying clean energy jobs.

As you cement your legacy to be the nation's greatest climate president, we urge you to use your authority designated under 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) to permanently withdraw unleased and at-risk areas of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) from fossil fuel development. These coastal waters are too economically and ecologically important to drill, and our coastal communities deserve protection from the known dangers posed by offshore drilling.

In January 2018, then-President Trump published a draft five-year plan for offshore oil and gas development, which opened more than 90 percent of the OCS to oil and gas leasing, including the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic coasts, as well as the Gulf of Mexico.[1] Fortunately, that plan was stopped by the courts amid intense public and bipartisan backlash, but the risk to these vulnerable areas is now higher than ever – unless you enact permanent protections.

Section 12(a) of OCSLA states that "the President of the United States may, from time to time, withdraw from disposition any of the unleased lands of the Outer Continental Shelf." Since 2014, every administration has used this authority to prevent offshore oil and gas drilling in key areas, including portions of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans, as well as the Gulf of Mexico.

- December 2014: President Obama withdrew the North Aleutian Basin Planning Area in the Arctic Ocean without expiration.[2]

[1] Federal Register, Notice of Availability of the 2019-2024 draft proposed outer continental shelf oil and gas leasing, January 8, 2018 https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/01/08/2018-00083/notice-of-availability-of-the-2019-2024-draft-proposed-outer-continental-shelf-oil-and-gas-leasing
[2] Memorandum on Withdrawal of Certain Areas of the United States Outer Continental Shelf from Leasing Disposition, December 16, 2014, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/16/presidential-memorandum-withdrawal-certain-areas-united-states-outer-con

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD010.pdf

November 15, 2024

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The 197 organizations signed are united against the expansion of offshore drilling in our nation's waters, and we are writing to urge your use of the authority granted to you under Section 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) to maximize permanent protections from oil and gas drilling. Withdrawals will safeguard vulnerable coastal communities, advance the transition to clean energy, and build on your climate legacy.

Withdrawing areas from leasing under Section 12(a) is a powerful and durable way to protect vulnerable areas and to prevent additional climate emissions. Section 12(a) of OCSLA gives the President authority to withdraw any unleased areas offshore and ensure that those areas are not offered for sale in future lease sales to the oil and gas industry for development. Withdrawals can be permanent or time limited. Once created, only Congress has the power to revoke the protections. Past administrations have successfully utilized this power to withdraw vulnerable areas from leasing, including the Arctic Ocean, the eastern Gulf, and parts of the Atlantic.

Additional protections are needed both to protect vulnerable coastal communities and to bolster our climate. Impacts from spills, air pollution, and climate change are all hitting low-income and minority communities the hardest. Nearly 40 percent of Americans live in coastal counties, and almost all live near coasts that are not permanently protected from offshore oil and gas development. Rising sea levels and erosion are already forcing some vulnerable coastal communities to relocate as fossil fuel emissions drive the climate crisis. Toxic pollution from refineries and petrochemical facilities disproportionately affects environmental justice communities that are located nearby. Other impacts of development, such as those from oil spills, disproportionately harm Black, Indigenous, and Latino people who rely on fishing or hunting, or other uses of natural resources. The potential for additional oil and gas activities that disproportionately impact environmental justice communities is alarming.

We are confronting a global climate catastrophe, and the oceans are bearing the brunt of global warming. They have absorbed 90 percent of the extra heat created from human-caused carbon. With increased emissions and absorbed heat come warming ocean temperatures, sea-level rise, and the shifting of ocean currents and distributions of marine life. The climate disaster is already wreaking havoc across the United States and along our coasts. Even now, increasingly intense and extreme weather brings dangerous storm surges farther inland, expanding their deadly and

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD011.pdf

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 19, 2024

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC, 20007

President Biden:

Since day one, you have delivered on your commitment to take the bold, transformative action we need to address the climate crisis and chart a path toward a safer, cleaner energy future for all Americans. Through historic investments in the Inflation Reduction Act, Infrastructure Law, and CHIPS and Science Act, the United States has become a global leader in the fight against climate change, all while boosting our economy with billions of dollars in private sector investments and hundreds of thousands of good-paying clean energy jobs.

As you cement your legacy to be the nation's greatest climate president, we urge you to use your authority designated under 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) to permanently withdraw unleased and at-risk areas of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) from fossil fuel development. These coastal waters are too economically and ecologically important to drill, and our coastal communities deserve protection from the known dangers posed by offshore drilling.

In January 2018, then-President Trump published a draft five-year plan for offshore oil and gas development, which opened more than 90 percent of the OCS to oil and gas leasing, including the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic coasts, as well as the Gulf of Mexico.[1] Fortunately, that plan was stopped by the courts amid intense public and bipartisan backlash, but the risk to these vulnerable areas is now higher than ever – unless you enact permanent protections.

Section 12(a) of OCSLA states that "the President of the United States may, from time to time, withdraw from disposition any of the unleased lands of the Outer Continental

[1] Federal Register, Notice of Availability of the 2019-2024 draft proposed outer continental shelf oil and gas leasing, January 8, 2018 https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/01/08/2018-00083/notice-of-availability-of-the-2019-2024-draft-proposed-outer-continental-shelf-oil-and-gas-leasing

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD013.pdf

[The article follows:]

The New York Times https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/13/climate/signal-peak-mine-coal.html

A Faked Kidnapping and Cocaine: A Montana Mine's Descent Into Chaos

The Signal Peak Mine was embroiled in a web of criminal activity. Now, environmental groups want to shut it down.

By Hiroko Tabuchi
Tabuchi reported from the mine site and surrounding ranches.

Jan. 13, 2023

Just before 2 a.m. on April 18, 2018, Amy Price, the wife of the coal executive Larry Price Jr., called the police in Bluefield, Va., to report her husband missing. Police scoured Bluefield, a town of less than 10,000 people nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and soon discovered Mr. Price's white Mercedes at a deserted parking lot.

Mr. Price, a 42-year-old father of six, was an industrious businessman who ran surface operations at an underground mine, one of the nation's largest, near Roundup, Mont. He also ran a motorcycle shop, Hawg Pit Cycles, that traded used Harley-Davidsons. And he had promised several investors big returns in coal. Recently, some of them had confronted Mr. Price about their money.

As night fell, a driver traveling along a state road some 20 miles away from Bluefield noticed a man on the roadside: a disheveled Mr. Price, who was rushed to a hospital. He told investigators he had been abducted by an outlaw biker gang that drugged him and took him to his motorcycle shop where they robbed him before loading him into a van and dumping him on the roadside. When surveillance cameras showed there hadn't been a robbery, he changed his story, saying that the gang had asked him for coal train schedules for a scheme to traffic methamphetamines by rail.

The truth was, Mr. Price hadn't been kidnapped at all. As he later admitted in court, he had staged his own kidnapping, a last-ditch attempt to escape investors' wrath for embezzlement schemes totaling more than $20 million that he'd hatched with the president of the Montana coal mine.

The embezzlement and fake kidnapping were part of the unraveling of a coal company called Signal Peak Energy that also involved bribery, cocaine trafficking, firearms

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD012.pdf

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Finally, I would like to enter for the record this roundup of statements of support from Members of Congress, governors, and

State officials, local elected officials, national organizations, and tribal organizations. Thank you.

Mr. STAUBER. Without objection.

[The statements follows:]

Statement Roundup | Biden Administration Protects U.S. Outer Continental Shelf areas off the East and West coasts, the eastern Gulf of Mexico, and additional portions of the Northern Bering Sea in Alaska

January 6, 2025 | Updated January 10, 2025

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The full document is available for viewing at:

https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II06/20250520/118250/HHRG-119-II06-20250520-SD014.pdf

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Mr. STAUBER. I will now recognize myself for 5 minutes of questioning.

Under the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, along with bipartisan reforms that were signed into law by President Biden last Congress, agencies have 2 years to complete an environmental impact statement from the date when an agency determines that such an EIS is necessary for the proposed action. Mr. Phipps, when did the department realize an EIS would be necessary for this modification for your project?

Mr. PHIPPS. December 2022.

Mr. STAUBER. And when was the hearing?

Mr. PHIPPS. The final hearing was in February 2023.

Mr. STAUBER. Did the department start the EIS process on that date?

Mr. PHIPPS. We started the EIS process, selected a contractor. We were given a schedule that the EIS would be complete by July 2024. And time and time again, every time we met, the schedule would slip by 1 month, 2 months. Pretty soon the schedule slipped all the way until 2026.

Mr. STAUBER. Why do you think that happened?

Mr. PHIPPS. I believe it was intentional.

Mr. STAUBER. And the law says for the Fiscal Responsibility Act for an environmental assessment it is a 1-year shot clock. That is law. And for an EIS it is a 2-year shot clock. That is law. We know that the Biden administration took that as recommendations, and it is unfortunate.

When did they start?

Mr. PHIPPS. So, the notice of intent was in August 2023 after months and months of delaying just to get the notice of intent out. So, they officially started it in December 2022, when they notified——

Mr. STAUBER. Yes.

Mr. PHIPPS [continuing]. Signal Peak and the court that an EIS needed to be complete, but it wasn't until August 2023 where they officially did a notice of intent. But the BUILDER Act says the earlier of the two.

Mr. STAUBER. How many NEPA reviews have you completed for this specific modification?

Mr. PHIPPS. This is our fourth.

Mr. STAUBER. This is your fourth NEPA review for this modification?

Mr. PHIPPS. That is correct.

Mr. STAUBER. And how long has this process taken overall?

Mr. PHIPPS. The initial leasing of the coal was in 2011, and we began mining Federal coal in 2015. And constant litigation has been on and off, or they have been successful on some areas but they have also been denied on others. But it has been constant litigation for a decade.

Mr. STAUBER. That is really uncalled for.

Mr. Kief, as we have discussed, Representative Higgins's bill would limit the size and duration of offshore withdrawals and require details of economic and resource assessments before areas are locked away from development. For companies like Crosby Tugs, which support offshore engineering, procurement, construction, and installation, how would maintaining more predictable, long-term access to offshore areas impact your business investment decisions, workforce stability, and ability to plan for future operations?

Mr. KIEF. It is the only way to gain stability, for us to be able to plan in an efficient manner. There is no way in the world that we could depend on what we are seeing right now. It is just too soft. You know, I live in south Louisiana. I am not walking on rocky ground in Texas. We are walking in the marsh.

Mr. STAUBER. Right.

Mr. KIEF. And this is the same thing, you know? How can we walk in this marsh? We can't. It is just not substantial enough for us to be able to depend on.

Now, how would it affect us if it would be much more stable? Well, we are a company that likes to grow and be diverse, you know, and we just don't have it. We don't, we are not seeing what we need to be able to do those things.

Mr. STAUBER. Dr. West, turning to USGS programs, it is my understanding that there can be often a domino effect from one of the hazards we discussed today. Is that correct?

Dr. WEST. Yes, it is. Earthquakes trigger landslides, landslides happen as a result of volcanoes. These are all inter-related hazards. And I would have to point out tsunamis, which are not part of our story today, but certainly with NOAA——

Mr. STAUBER. Yes.

Dr. WEST [continuing]. Sitting next to me.

Mr. STAUBER. Yes, you answered my last question, which are how are these USGS programs interconnected? Is it safe to say these programs build off each other, and are thus more effective when operated together?

Dr. WEST. I think that is absolutely a good statement. The individuals, the scientists who sit behind these programs and the systems they operate are all interconnected.

Mr. STAUBER. I want to thank you all for your valuable testimony and time today.

The members of the Subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses, and we will ask you to respond to those in writing. Under Committee rule 3, members of the Committee must submit questions to the Committee clerk by 5 p.m. on Friday, May 23. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for these responses.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:41 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Statement for the Record

Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, U.S. Department of the Interior

H.R. 931, To allow certain Federal minerals to be mined consistent with the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification, and for other purposes

May 20, 2025

Chairman Stauber, Ranking Member Ansari, and members of the Subcommittee, the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) is pleased to provide this Statement for the Record on H.R. 931, a bill to allow certain Federal minerals to be mined consistent with the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification, and for other purposes.

Background

The Bull Mountains Mine No. 1 (Bull Mountains Mine) is an underground coal mine in Musselshell and Yellowstone Counties in Montana. Bull Mountains Mine is currently mining limited portions of non-Federal coal that is accessible without access to Federal coal reserves. The mine has reported that without approval to mine Federal coal, the mine will run out of coal in late—2025 and be forced to close, necessitating layoffs of 85–90% of the approximately 250 employees.

On his first day in office, President Trump issued Executive Order 14156, Declaring a National Energy Emergency, to support the development of a reliable, diversified, and affordable supply of energy to meet our nation's needs. In accordance with that directive, in early May, OSMRE began to carry out the environmental review process to support the expansion of the Bull Mountains Mine. If approved, this project is expected to significantly contribute to creating jobs and economic prosperity for Americans and support the nation's energy independence.

H.R. 931, a bill to allow certain Federal minerals to be mined consistent with the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification, and for other purposes

H.R. 931 would authorize Federal coal reserves leased under Federal Coal Lease MTM 97988 to be mined in accordance with the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification and would direct the Secretary of the Interior to approve the Bull Mountains Mining Plan Modification within 30 days of enactment. OSMRE supports the intent of the bill to address the national energy emergency and would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor and Subcommittee on technical changes, including verifying the Federal land description to ensure alignment with the full scope of the Federal coal lease and referencing the current status of the mining plan modification.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this Statement for the Record.

Statement for the Record

U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior

H.R. 2250, National Landslide Preparedness Act Reauthorization Act of 2025; H.R. 3168, National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program Reauthorization Act of 2025; and H.R. 3176, to amend the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act to reauthorize the National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System

May 20, 2025

Chairman Stauber, Ranking Member Ansari, thank you for inviting the Department to provide this statement on three bills that reauthorize key programs within the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) that help make the United States a more hazard-ready nation.

For geologic hazards such as earthquakes, landslides, and volcanoes, the USGS provides timely and accurate information to emergency managers and response officials. USGS monitoring and geospatial data combined with multi-disciplinary expertise deliver real-time situational awareness and long-term hazard assessments to inform and educate at-risk communities during crises and to anticipate and prepare for future geologic hazard events.

H.R. 2250

Landslides are a deadly and costly hazard that impact every U.S. state and territory. The USGS is the lead Federal agency providing actionable landslide hazard and risk information to decision makers and the public. We also lead advances in the use of lidar to map topography to ever higher fidelity, valuable applications of which are landslide hazard assessments and other core public safety and commercial applications. The National Landslide Preparedness Act (NLPA), first signed into law by President Trump in January 2021, has accelerated efforts to reduce Americans' exposure to landslide hazard and risk through the National Landslide Hazard Reduction Program and 3D Elevation Program. Under the Act, the USGS has expanded national coverage of landslide inventories and hazard assessments; delivered faster, more accurate debris flow early warnings to state and Federal partners, including post-wildfire; developed emergency response protocols for landslide disasters; and dramatically increased the coverage of high-resolution topographic data available to support hazard analyses across the United States. We have also established interagency and advisory bodies to ensure efficiency and oversight called for by the Act.

Studying landslides requires more than just lidar, and lidar is used to study more than just landslides, but the association of the two activities by NLPA is appropriate and effective. In addition, expanding coordination and development of improved mapping of stream networks from lidar will improve community risk assessments of destructive post-wildfire debris flows.

H.R. 2250 would reauthorize NLPA through 2030. Changes to NLPA, such as new priorities focusing on atmospheric rivers and other hydrologic events, as well as new frameworks for regional stakeholder participation, will improve implementation in the future. The Department supports the intent of H.R. 2250, but would like to work with the Sponsor to align the authorization levels to the President's Budget.

H.R. 3168

Earthquakes represent one of our Nation's most significant and costly natural hazards. Thirty-seven U.S. States, and all U.S. Territories have experienced an earthquake exceeding magnitude five over the past two centuries, and 50 percent of States have a significant potential for future damaging shaking. The USGS and our partner agencies, the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, have participated in the interagency National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) since its inception in 1977, following the San Fernando Earthquake in Los Angeles. NEHRP has helped make America "earthquake ready" with innovative science, extensive seismic monitoring networks, and the first earthquake early warning system in the U.S., ShakeAlert. NEHRP exists to reduce the losses associated with earthquake hazards, in recognition that although earthquakes are inevitable, their consequences for people and the built environment are not.

Under NEHRP, the USGS recently published an unprecedented 50-state National Seismic Hazard model, describing the likelihood and potential effects of earthquakes nationwide. The USGS also developed and deployed the first-ever earthquake early warning system for the U.S., called ShakeAlert, which is now live across California, Oregon, and Washington and which has delivered potentially life-saving information on pending shaking for dozens of earthquakes. Since its inception, ShakeAlert has delivered real-time information on tens of thousands of earthquakes domestically and abroad, including impact estimates and aftershock forecasts, through some of the most heavily utilized web pages across the Federal government, receiving tens of millions of visitors even on days without significant earthquake activity. In collaboration with FEMA, the USGS has recently updated estimates of annualized earthquake losses for the nation, showing reductions in loss when measured against increases in building value, which indicates progress in reducing building vulnerability largely thanks to the efforts of NEHRP.

H.R. 3168 would reauthorize NEHRP through 2030 and includes several improvements to NEHRP the USGS supports. In particular, the bill would integrate the Chair of the Scientific Earthquake Studies Advisory Committee into the NEHRP oversight structure. This body is the most important external advisory to the USGS related to earthquake science, and codifying its role within NEHRP will strengthen the program. H.R. 3168 would also authorize future expansion of earthquake early warning and the dissemination of aftershock forecasts after significant earthquakes, both of which are tools the USGS and our NEHRP partners will need to make America even safer from earthquakes. The Department supports the intent of H.R. 3168, but would like to work with the Sponsor to align the authorization levels to the President's Budget.

H.R. 3176

The National Volcano Early Warning System (NVEWS) authorization was first signed into law by President Trump in 2019 to establish a unified and integrated volcano monitoring system for the Nation to ensure public safety from volcano hazards. The USGS has pursued this objective by merging our volcano observatories into one interoperable Volcano Science Center, and we have begun planning a national volcano information center to make our data more useable and provide watch office capabilities around the clock. Earlier this year, unrest at Mt. Spurr west of Anchorage reminded us why volcano monitoring is crucial to the Nation. Hundreds of thousands of Americans and millions of dollars of cargo traveling by plane can be impacted by eruptions. The USGS volcano monitoring capabilities enabled by NVEWS are essential to addressing gaps in coverage keeping Americans safe.

H.R. 3176 would reauthorize NVEWS through 2030. The Department supports the bill as introduced.

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Stauber

JOHN L. WEISS
506 Hunt Club Dr
McMurray, PA 15317

Mobile: 412-496-0924
jweiss@johnlweiss.com

July 30, 2024

The Honorable Joe Manchin III
Chair – Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Subject: Response to June 11, 2024 "Letter of Opposition to Senate Bills 4431, 4432" as submitted by Nine Organizations Regarding Signal Peak Energy, LLC ("Signal Peak Energy") in Musselshell and Yellowstone Counties, Montana

Dear Senator Manchin:

My name is John L. Weiss; presented herein is my response to the letter ("the Letter") that was submitted jointly by nine identified organizations opposed to S. 4431 and S. 4432 as it relates to Signal Peak Energy and the Bull Mountains No. 1 Mine in Montana.

1. Personal Background

I am a Vice President at John T. Boyd Company, a privately held mining and geological consultancy based in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania (near Pittsburgh) with international offices in Brisbane (Australia); Bogota (Colombia), and Beijing (China). We have provided a wide range of professional advisory services regarding the mining and mineral industries to a diverse client base since 1943 (eighty-one years). Our domestic and international clientele includes mining companies, investors, utilities, financial institutions, attorneys, governmental agencies, reserve owners, equipment manufacturers, railroads, and other participants in the mining and mineral industries. We have performed thousands of coal-related assignments while working in every major coal- producing basin of the US and in more than 90 countries.

I grew up in a coal mining community in Clearfield County, Pennsylvania. I was raised in the home where my mother was born: a patch house on a dirt road that was finally paved when I was in junior high school. My father worked several years in an underground coal mine, and both grandfathers spent their entire working careers as underground miners. My career started as a general laborer in an underground coal mine 43 years ago. After graduation (B.S.

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