

Testimony Before the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources

Written Statement

Testimony of Breon Robinson

September 28, 2023

Chair Westerman, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. While I am here to speak against the leasing and drilling that is looking to potentially be done, I look forward to also discussing the beauty and uniqueness of the Gulf Coast-- a coast and its people, that are also on the verge of extinction due to oil and gas buildout.

My name is Breon Robinson, and I live in Lake Charles, LA, which is part of Calcasieu Parish and the Southwest Louisiana region. I am a fourth-generation resident of the North Lake Charles/Goosport community. Currently, I am a student at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Communications, majoring in Political Communication. Aside from that, I have been an active member in my community, working on a variety of issues ranging from civic engagement to environmental justice.

Growing up in the heart of Sportsman's Paradise, I have grown to love this beautiful place. From the food, the unique scenery, to our Cajun/Creole culture, there will never be any place like home. Memories from my childhood get me excited, where I often like to imagine the next generation of my bloodline who will inhabit this land. But then, those dreams soon get pushed away to our harsh reality with this mass incline of oil and gas buildout that is plaguing my state. From there it makes me think, will there even be a Louisiana in the next 50 years?

When I was approached with this opportunity, I sought after it with the goal of bringing what Louisiana means to me to this House Committee. Coming with me is good, but also the bad. The devastation, but also the resilience. Living in a community that is surrounded by huge oil and gas buildout, yet 3 years after Hurricanes Laura and Delta, Winter Storm Uri, a historic 100-year flood, tornadoes and more, we are still fighting to receive the most basic necessities needed to survive. For decades, we have been promised by these oil and gas companies that allowing them into our communities would bring a "better" economy, "well-paying jobs" and just an overall better way of living. Yet, decades later, our community is dealing with homelessness like never before, and those jobs are being thrown to outsiders who will come and go after their assignment is done. Before industry, our community thrived off the environment through seafood and lumber. We were one with Mother Earth.

As I began to read more into the Bridge Protection Act of 2023, it began to frustrate me that a politician who is elected and paid by us, would be ok without having community input on this bill. As I have witnessed the buildout, I have also witnessed the devastating decline of life and

community from oil and gas. Although this offshore leasing and drilling will not be directly in our faces, it will affect us as if it is. In this bill proposal, they are looking to offer four large leases for sale in the Gulf of Mexico, and if this was to pass and happen, these sales would not have to go through NEPA or any environmental reviews.

As I stated earlier, our community thrived in the seafood industry. Now, there is a new generation of fishermen who are still looking to thrive in the seafood industry, although they are now having to coexist and share the water and land with industries who are not looking to do that fairly. Between the devastation that is happening onshore and what is looking to occur offshore, this will be a hard hit for our coast, which by the way is one of our natural protections from hurricanes—hurricanes that have now intensified in the last 20 years thanks to climate change.

I believe Louisiana and the Gulf Coast have the potential to be great away from oil and gas. We brag about being top of the list for partying, drinking and sports, yet we forget we are still dragging at the bottom of education, housing and healthcare. If we continue to put profit over people, New Orleans might become Atlantis by 2050. Or we will continue to see a mass decline of generations of Louisianans dying off due to air pollution and/or migrating off to other states. I love Louisiana just as much as any other person living here and I will continue to fight to keep Louisiana clean and beautiful for the next generations to come.