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April 5, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama, President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

RE: Florida Offshore Drilling Announcement 3/31/10
Energy Legislation

Dear Mr. President:

I commend your leadership on developing a comprehensive energy policy that addresses the tremendous challenges our nation and our planet now confront. Your Administration clearly is committed to increasing America's energy independence. We have gone far too long without the necessary strategy in place to accomplish this goal. Now, we have an opportunity to right the ship and move forward on a path of clean, sustainable, renewable energy alternatives to foreign oil.

Your vision is commendable, Mr. President, and I agree that increasing mileage standards, doubling the number of hybrid vehicles in the federal fleet, and transitioning to clean energy sources like advanced biofuels will reduce our consumption and generate millions of jobs in the new green economy. These are the kinds of solutions that all Americans can get behind as we look ahead to the day when we can declare our energy independence.

However, I am very concerned that your proposal reopens the debate over Florida offshore drilling, a debate that had been closed with the signing of the Gulf of Mexico Security Act in 2006. As Secretary Salazar succinctly put it, there are some places in our country that are too special to drill. Florida's coastline certainly fits that description.

Secretary Salazar also cited five core principles that the Administration is committed to in regards to offshore drilling. I would like to respond to these by giving some context on what they mean for Florida. **The first principle is that offshore development occur "in the right places and the right ways."** Florida is different than other states in the Gulf Coast region. Over many decades, Florida developed thriving tourism and fishing economies rather than industrialize our coastline. Florida's long-term

economic health is dependent upon clean beaches and clean oceans. Oil spills are far more likely in the Gulf due to our long history of hurricanes, which wreak havoc on offshore oil developments. Florida's tourism industry employs more than one million Floridians and has a roughly \$65 billion impact on the state. Our economy is struggling with double-digit unemployment which currently stands at 12.2%. I am confident that Florida's economy will recover, but Florida's long term economic outlook will suffer immensely if near shore drilling is allowed.

The second principle speaks to a commitment to “sound information and sound science.” I support your Administration's reliance on strong data, and I urge you to revisit the science that has pointed to serious harm in the event of a spill or leakage. According to research by Dr. Weisberg of the University of South Florida, if a spill occurred over the broad, shallow Gulf Coast OCS, currents would likely sweep the pollution along the beaches, bays and wetlands along Florida's Gulf Coast. The actual distance offshore is much less important than whether the spill occurs on or off of the continental shelf.

Pollution from oil rigs or a spill in the deep waters of the eastern Gulf near the Loop Current would flow south, contaminate the Keys and the Marine Sanctuary and then be pushed north and wreak further havoc on Florida's Atlantic Coast. Objective, scientific data shows that such pollution does not simply wash onshore but would affect the beaches and coral reefs on the west and east coasts of Florida and then become a part of the Gulf Stream affecting beaches and economies all the way up the East Coast. These are risks that we cannot afford to take, given how dependent Florida is on the health of its beaches and coastal marine life.

The third principle is a commitment to listen to “the communities most affected.” More so than any other coastal state apart from California, the risk profile for Florida is the greatest. The economic and environmental importance of keeping the Eastern Gulf of Mexico free of industrialized oil extraction cannot be overemphasized, especially when it comes to the state of Florida. Dr. Stephen Leatherman, also known as “Dr. Beach” who compiles the annual Best Beaches in America ranking, advised that drilling by oil companies in the eastern Gulf of Mexico would lower the value of our beaches and reduce the allure of Florida for American and foreign tourists. Florida's heavy dependence on the tourism industry makes drilling any closer to our shores a risk that our economy just cannot afford to take.

The fourth principle affirms the Administration's pledge to “following the law” and having “an orderly process for exploration and development.” I believe that the GOMESA Act of 2006 established the boundaries of safe and responsible oil drilling in the Gulf. This key piece of legislation assured coastal communities that relevant environmental impact studies would determine the feasibility of leases and permits. It also took into consideration the importance of military operations and readiness. The Eastern Gulf is currently the only long range weapons and operations testing area on the east coast. Key weapons programs that are currently in the testing cycle, such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, and the AMRAAM missile, require very

large footprints in the test range. If GOMESA is not maintained, these live ammunition tests could not be carried out. Furthermore, existing debris from operations poses a serious safety risk for the oil platforms and personnel. GOMESA's leasing of targeted areas avoided some of the most serious risk of environmental damage, although hazards remain, but I believe it was a compromise worth committing to.

The final principle is intended to ensure that "American taxpayers are getting a fair return for the use of their resources." The effects of maintaining the protected areas of GOMESA on gas prices would be nearly nonexistent. As you know, it would be years before consumers felt any relief from gas prices from new drilling. A report by the federal Energy Information Administration in 2007 said that such a move would have an insignificant impact on gas prices. It also said that drilling in non-restricted portions of the Eastern Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic and Pacific oceans would not have a significant effect on domestic crude oil production or prices before 2030. Production from any new areas outlined in your proposal would likely be pushed even further into the future.

Americans are clamoring for comprehensive, long-term energy solutions so that we are less dependent on foreign oil, and your Administration is making progress in delivering those solutions. I continue to support your efforts to stay focused on a balanced plan that includes renewables, solar, wind, and conservation while promoting domestic production where benefits outweigh the risks. The objective, scientific data demonstrates that the risks of drilling in certain OCS areas far outweigh the rather dubious benefits. This must be recognized as we consider your Administration's domestic drilling proposal. Thank you for the opportunity to share this perspective.

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor
U.S. Representative
Florida-District 11

Cc: The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
Carol Browner, Director, White House Office of Energy and Climate Change Policy
Rahm Emmanuel, White House Chief of Staff
Phil Schiliro, Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs