



The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce

Serving Currituck and Dare Counties, Ocracoke Island

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RE: OpEd

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SAVE OUR OCEANS AND SHORES

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people flock to the beaches along the Outer Banks of North Carolina to enjoy the sun, sand and pristine ocean waters we're famous for around the world.

We're proud of our oceans and beaches. They burnish our reputation as a world-class destination state.

Our ocean and beaches provide an enormous boost to our economy, contributing about \$1.4 billion to the Outer Banks regional economy, including tourism and recreation, construction and fishing industries. And they support more than 15,000 jobs in Dare and Currituck Counties.

But our coastal waters are at risk. The Trump administration signaled in 2018 plans to open all of our ocean waters—in the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic—to risky offshore oil and gas drilling.

While the administration has [postponed its plans](#) after a court setback and local opposition, it could again move ahead. That could expose our oceans to the dangers of drilling, of blowouts, disastrous spills and sonic blasts used in exploration that are dangerous and deadly to [whales and other marine life](#).

In Washington, two bills are scheduled to be voted on in September that would protect our oceans, permanently, from offshore drilling and we should encourage our members of Congress to support them.

They are H.R. 205 "Protecting and Securing Florida's Coastline Act of 2019," sponsored by Rep. Francis Rooney, (R-Fla.) and H.R. 1941 the "Coastal and Marine Economies Protection Act," sponsored by Rep. Joe Cunningham, (D-S.C.).

The first would permanently extend the moratorium on offshore oil and gas leasing in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico off Florida's coast, and the second would prevent the secretary of the U.S. Interior Department from including any drilling off the Pacific or Atlantic coasts in its offshore oil and gas leasing plan.

We call on our members of Congress to support these measures that would protect our economy, our livelihood and the ocean communities of marine life.

You'd be hard-pressed to find something more important to the natural cycles that support all life on earth than healthy and clean oceans. Oil and gas development and production at sea puts that at grave risk of blowouts, spills and sonic blasts.

We all remember the [2010 BP blowout](#) that killed 11 workers, spread more than 200 million gallons of toxic crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico and tossed thousands of people out of work. For 87 days we watched oil gush into ocean waters while industry tried, and failed, to stop it.

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Disturbing pictures and videos showed scores of pelicans, dolphins, turtles and other marine life dying, coated in oil that polluted more than 1,000 miles of the coast. A presidential commission told us how to prevent such a disaster from happening again.

But the Trump administration ignored those recommendations and warnings in an effort to give a big financial gift to private oil and gas companies, which is why we need to permanently safeguard our oceans from this inherently risky industrial exploitation.

The fact is, spills happen. Their devastation continues long after they are contained, and they can be hard to stop in the first place.

The Taylor Energy spill off the Louisiana coast, the longest running offshore oil spill in U.S. history, has spewed as much as [4,500 gallons a day](#) for 14 years into the Gulf of Mexico and [continues threatening marine life](#).

In recent weeks, an oil spill prompted [ExxonMobil to suspend oil production](#) from a platform offshore from Newfoundland, Canada. A spill [was reported](#) in Cox Bay in Louisiana's Breton Sound. Thousands of gallons of [oil spilled into the ocean](#) in the area of Patagonia, in Chile.

It's no wonder there's been so much opposition to offshore drilling in the pristine waters off the U.S. coasts.

More than 360 municipalities and more than 2,200 elected local, state and federal officials have opposed offshore oil and gas drilling and seismic blasting, including more than 260 along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, [according to Oceana](#).

The majority of [Americans oppose](#) new offshore drilling, period.

Let's get behind the movement in Congress to permanently protect our oceans, beaches and shorelines from the risks and dangers of offshore drilling.

We have too much to lose, if we are silent, and so much to gain for our communities, economy, livelihood and future by again speaking out.

It's time to save our shores, for all time.

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Karen Brown is the President & CEO of the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce. The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce is an advocate for business on North Carolina's Outer Banks. A regional organization, the Outer Banks Chamber serves Dare County, Currituck County and Ocracoke Island. There are currently close to 1000 members.

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