



**THE DEFENSE SUPPORT INITIATIVES COMMITTEE**  
OKALOOSA, SANTA ROSA AND WALTON COUNTIES

August 10, 2018

Jason Blakeney, Editor  
Northwest Florida Daily News

Subject: Eastern Gulf Drilling Threatens National Security

Dear Mr. Blakeney

Drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico threatens our national security. Most are unaware that this subject area is a military range essential to our military's success and critically important to delivering the required capabilities to our men & women deployed overseas. The Eastern Gulf Test & Training Range (EGTTR) connects test & training capabilities from NW Florida to Key West. Eglin AFB utilizes the range as well as other military branches, installations, government agencies, and private companies.

The risk of drilling in the eastern Gulf needs to be understood. Proponents of drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico (EGOMEX) cite a potential impact of 56,000 jobs and \$2.6 billion in annual revenue. The 2017 Florida Defense Factbook cites Eglin AFB's annual economic impact as over \$9 Billion annually and over 72,000 jobs. This does not include the large technologically based defense industry workforce. Florida's military economic impact is over 801,747 jobs and \$84.9 Billion. This existing economic benefit would be at risk, not to mention our national security, if drilling and related activities were allowed in the EGOMEX.

The Military Mission Line (MML) is a federal moratorium protecting the EGTTR by banning drilling leases in the eastern Gulf. This moratorium expires in 2022 and it needs to be extended. Drilling structures and activities east of the MML would be incompatible with military activities, negatively impact our military's readiness and compromise our nation's military superiority. In 2017, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense stated, "The DoD cannot overstate the vital importance of maintaining this moratorium." A May 2018 Pentagon report, Preserving Military Readiness in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico, states, "The EGOMEX is an irreplaceable national asset. No other area offers the DoD a comparable combination of air space, water space, and existing infrastructure to support military activities."

Energy independence should not cost us our nation's security. As a national asset, it is critically important to preserve the EGTTR—an area of highest military importance requiring the MML to be permanently sustained to protect our nation's security.

It is important that we all contact our legislators to make this happen.

John Wilcox, SES (ret.), PhD  
Chairman, Defense Support Initiatives Committee