



DEFENSE SUPPORT INITIATIVES COMMITTEE
OKALOOSA, SANTA ROSA AND WALTON COUNTIES

August 31, 2021

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As members of the Defense Support Initiatives Committee in the Northwest Florida region, we respectfully urge you to strongly support all efforts to end future oil leasing for the Eastern Gulf of Mexico Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). As documented by the Department of Defense, our national defense depends upon the Gulf Test and Training Range for vital military testing, training, and experimentation purposes. The threat posed by offshore drilling related activities in this region puts our military readiness and national security at risk.

The Gulf Test and Training Range is the largest military training range in the continental United States and provides more uninterrupted surface and airspace than all other ranges in the lower 48 combined.¹ Its enormous size along with numerous adjacent military installations create a critical military asset that simply cannot be replicated anywhere else.² According to a 2018 Department of Defense report, unrestricted offshore drilling is fundamentally at odds with military operations in the eastern Gulf of Mexico.³ Keeping this region free of oil leasing and associated infrastructure will help guarantee that vital military readiness activities can continue securely and without interference.

In 2006, Congress heeded Florida's bipartisan opposition to drilling by keeping most of the Eastern Gulf of Mexico free of offshore drilling activities.⁴ To preserve this marine area for benefit of both the environment and military operations, Congress enacted a moratorium through the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act through 2022. A 2020 Presidential Executive Order extended the protections through July 1, 2032. Simply put, this is not enough as these protections must be made permanent.

Under Section 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA), the President may "from time to time withdraw from disposition any unleased areas of the [OCS]." 43 U.S.C. § 1341(a). This authority has been used by Presidents Bush, Obama, and Trump, establishing precedent from

¹ Florida Defense Support Task Force (2017) Oil Drilling & Military Mission Compatibility in the Gulf of Mexico. Enterprise Florida, Inc.

² Ibid.

³ 6 Department of Defense (2018) Preserving Military Readiness in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico.


⁴ 43 USC 1331. Sec. 104. Moratorium on Oil and Gas Leasing in Certain Areas of Gulf of Mexico. Gulf of Mexico Energy Security.

both Republican and Democratic administrations to protect the OCS areas from expanded offshore oil and gas development.

Without the drilling moratorium and ready military access to the Eastern Gulf, Florida loses the main draw for hosting its 20 military installations as well as the economic boost these bases generate. In 2018, defense spending in the state generated \$95 billion in total economic impacts and contributed to nearly 915,000 jobs.⁵ The ripple effect of mission loss on Florida's economy would be massive. For example, an economic assessment of Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field found that if these bases suffered just a 5 percent loss in their usual mission activities, it would equate to a loss of 2,400 total jobs and \$181.5 million.⁶ Unhindered access to the Eastern Gulf of Mexico is crucial to maintaining the long-term prospects of the defense industry.

Oil spills along Florida's coastline not only threaten coastal economies but also military activities which would be hindered in the face of a large-scale spill and any cleanup activity that follows. As we know from the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon*, it took BP engineers and government contractors 87 days to cap the leaking wellhead and stop the flow of oil into the Gulf.⁷ If our service members cannot practice in conditions found throughout the Gulf Test and Training Range, they will be less prepared to defend our nation. If access to the Eastern Gulf of Mexico is traded for oil and gas development, we risk our military being a less capable force and falling behind our adversaries.⁸ It is not just a Florida issue – this affects our entire nation.

Budget reconciliation offers a valuable opportunity for you to permanently protect the Eastern Gulf of Mexico from future offshore oil drilling activities and we urge you to prioritize protecting the Gulf Test and Training Range this year. Permanent protections benefit our military, protect the environment, and buttress Florida's economy and we are counting on you to end this threat to our national security.

Sincerely,

Robert Marinan, Lt Col USAF (Ret)
Chairman

cc:

The Honorable Gina McCarthy, Assistant to the President and National Climate Advisor
The Honorable Brenda Mallory, Chair, Council on Environmental Quality
The Honorable Tommy Beaudreau, Deputy Secretary of the Interior
Ms. Amanda Lefton, Director, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

⁵ Enterprise Florida and Florida Defense Support Task Force (2020) Florida Defense Industry Economic Impact Analysis.

⁶ Team Eglin Economic Analysis of Mission Impact Scenarios (2019) Presented to the Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County.

⁷ National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon and Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling (2011) Deep Water: The Gulf oil disaster and the future of offshore drilling.

⁸ Department of Defense (2018) Preserving Military Readiness in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico