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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3603

February 9, 2005

The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Norton:

You will soon issue a Request for Comments on the development of the next five-year Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas leasing program. The five-year program will determine the size, timing, and location of all oil and gas lease sales on the OCS for the period from 2007-2012. Considering that approximately 80% of the OCS is currently under withdrawal or moratoria, *I urge you to begin the process by keeping **all** options on the table, and seeking information and input about both moratoria and non-moratoria regions of the OCS.*

The President's National Energy Policy contains recommendations to

“[1.] examine land status and lease stipulation impediments to federal oil and gas leasing, and review and modify those where opportunities exist (consistent with the law, good environmental practice, and balanced use of other resources)...

[2.] study ... impediments to federal oil and gas exploration and development.

[3.] Review public lands withdrawals and lease stipulations, with full public consultation, especially with the people in the region, to consider modifications where appropriate.

...

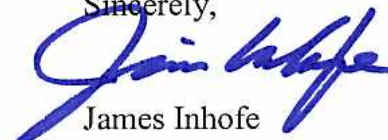
[4.] consider economic incentives for environmentally sound offshore oil and gas development where warranted by specific circumstances...”

The OCS leasing program provides an opportunity for the United States to produce its offshore energy reserves at a time when this country is facing an energy crisis.

It is high time that America move toward energy independence with more comprehensive leasing of federal waters. With technology we can explore in environmentally sound ways, out of sight of the shore.

The potential is vast and the need is real. Please examine leasing options within the moratoria area in the draft proposed program stage, as did the prior Administration when preparing the 1997-2002 draft proposed program.

Sincerely,



James Inhofe
United States Senator