



United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

August 23, 2005

The Honorable Gale A. Norton
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Room 7214
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Madam Secretary:

I was disturbed to learn that the Department of Interior's scope of comments for the 2007-2012 5-Year Leasing plan confirms the administration's interest in lifting the leasing bans off of our nation's coasts, especially in the Eastern Planning Area of the Gulf of Mexico. Creating a 100-mile buffer off of Florida is a clear reversal of the administration's claimed support for the leasing moratorium off of Florida. For these reasons, I urge you to reconsider the scope of solicited comments and to continue to honor the moratorium and leasing bans in place in the Eastern Planning Area and the rest of the country.

As you know, this call for comments contradicts the recently enacted Energy Policy Act, which included no provision to lift the more than 20-year moratoria along our coastlines. Further, in sharp contrast to the scope of comments for the 2002-2007 5-Year Leasing Plan, which sought comments only for non-moratoria areas, this notice seeks comments not only for non-moratoria areas, but also for moratoria areas.

Expanding the scope of comments and opening up moratoria areas to leasing will not lower the soaring gas prices businesses and consumers are currently experiencing. I recently suggested in a letter to the President, that the President seek a voluntary, temporary freeze from the oil companies on the wholesale fuel prices charged to distributors and dealers to ease the current economic uncertainty and allow for an investigation into the high prices and record profits of the oil and refining industry. This will do more to help consumers and businesses than encroaching on the nation's largest unrestricted air and sea space for military combat training, the Joint Gulf Range Complex in the Eastern Planning Area, for little oil.

According to your Minerals Management Service, the mean estimate of the oil reserves in the Eastern Planning Area of the Gulf of Mexico is 5.52 billion barrels. That is equivalent to 229 days or eight months of the United State's oil consumption. Instead of jeopardizing our fragile coastline environment and tourist economies for little return, we need to embark on a nation-wide effort to decrease our consumption of oil, increase our use of

alternative fuels, conserve more energy and diversify our energy sources, including the use of renewables and nuclear energy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.