

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 16, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C. Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Penny Pritzker
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Jewell and Secretary Pritzker:

The continued exploration and development of oil and natural gas in the Gulf of Mexico Outer Continental Shelf is vital to US energy security, economic vitality, and quality of life. Potential restrictions on future geological and geophysical activities, including seismic surveys, identified in the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Gulf of Mexico Geological and Geophysical Activities (DPEIS) are very concerning and would be detrimental to our states

Seismic surveys have been conducted safely in the Gulf of Mexico for the past fifty years by the oil and gas industry, government agencies, and academic researchers. They have taken place alongside successful fishing and tourism industries and within a thriving ecosystem with an abundance of marine life. This technology has allowed for the discovery of billions of barrels of oil and trillions of cubic feet of natural gas which, in turn, has produced millions of jobs, facilitated a robust regional economy, provided tens of billions of dollars annually to Federal and State governments, and lowered energy costs for U.S. consumers. The Gulf of Mexico is the backbone of US oil and natural gas development, and its importance cannot be overstated.

The DPEIS that BOEM published in cooperation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and other agencies identifies a range of alternative geological and geophysical activities and assesses the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives over a 10-year period. A number of the alternatives analyzed by BOEM, however, have been deemed unrealistic and overly restrictive by experts familiar with Gulf of Mexico activities. Some worry that those proposals would inhibit the timely and efficient collection of seismic data necessary for future oil and gas development in the Gulf of Mexico. As such, industry experts believe taking no action (Alternative A) allows for the best available scientific research to be carried out with little-to-no impact on marine mammal and wildlife populations. It is important to reiterate BOEM's chief environmental officer Dr. William Brown has stated that "there has been no documented scientific evidence of noise from air guns used in geological and geophysical (G&G) seismic activities adversely affecting marine animal populations or coastal communities."¹²

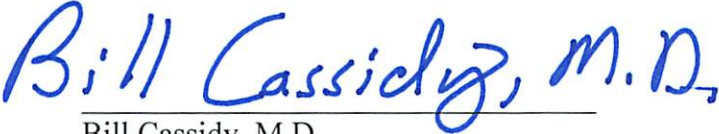
¹ <https://www.boem.gov/boem-science-note-august-2014/>

² <https://www.boem.gov/boem-science-note-march-2015/>

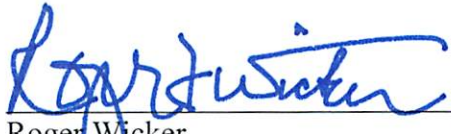
Seismic surveys are a proven, environmentally sound technology that have been used for decades, and we urge the agencies to select the aforementioned alternative as their preferred choice. We also urge the agencies that regulate oil and gas operations to take all necessary steps to ensure effective inter-agency coordination on this DPEIS and forthcoming regulations, so that breakdowns of the regulatory process – as seen in Alaska and the Atlantic OCS arenas – are not repeated.

Continuing to conduct geophysical surveys in the Gulf of Mexico will produce known discoveries safely and more efficiently and will help uncover new sources of oil and natural gas. This data will allow the government to make informed decisions about the potential for continued job creation and economic growth from offshore energy production in the Gulf. Seismic and other geophysical surveys in the Gulf of Mexico are a critical part of the safe offshore energy development that is necessary to harness our nation's energy potential for the benefit of American energy consumers.

Sincerely,



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



Roger Wicker
United States Senator



David Vitter
United States Senator