



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor
Transition Office

Ralph S. Northam
Governor - elect

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January 10, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Secretary Zinke,

As Governor-elect of Virginia, I write to ask that Virginia be excluded from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's next iteration of the Five Year Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

I grew up on Virginia's Eastern Shore and can tell you firsthand that the Chesapeake Bay and the Commonwealth's ocean and coastal resources are every bit as ecologically and economically valuable as those of Florida, a state that was recently exempted from the leasing plan. I am encouraged by the decision to exempt Florida from the plan, and respectfully ask that the same exemption be made for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Over the next four years as Governor, my charge is to work every day to grow Virginia's economy. As you may know, nearly half of the economy of the Hampton Roads region is tied to our military assets, and we are in constant competition with other states to retain and grow these resources. Less than two years ago, the Department of Defense raised material objections to the incompatibility of drilling with naval operations off Virginia's coast. Nothing should be done to jeopardize our strong position with the military in Virginia.

Virginia's tourism industry is the Commonwealth's fifth largest private employer, with travelers spending over \$22 billion annually and supporting more than 200,000 jobs. In addition to tourism, Virginia has seen significant growth in its seafood industry. The leading seafood producer on the East Coast, the third largest producer in the country, and the national leader in hard clam aquaculture, Virginia depends on healthy and clean water that is only possible through responsible environmental stewardship.

I also urge the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to allow the Virginians who would be impacted most by this decision – those on the coast – an opportunity to make their voices heard during the public comment period that ends on March 9, 2018. BOEM has scheduled only one public meeting on this proposed action in Virginia, nearly 100 miles from the coastal communities that would most feel its impacts. On behalf of the Virginians I was elected to serve, I request the addition of sessions in Hampton Roads and on the Eastern Shore to allow those interested the ability to voice the concerns of their communities.

The Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act specifically gives weight to the opinions of the Governors in coastal states where leases are considered. A bipartisan coalition of Governors – including the Governors of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida – have expressed opposition to drilling for oil and gas off of their coasts. I hope Virginians will be afforded an opportunity to have their voices heard and to avoid the adverse impacts associated with offshore drilling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph S. Northam".

Ralph S. Northam

Cc: Mr. Walter Cruickshank
Acting Director, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management