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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

August 17, 2017

SENIOR MEMBER, FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

Secretary Ryan Zinke
Department of Interior
1849 C St NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

I write you today to reiterate my concern over the critically important issue of the issuance of a new National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2019-2024 that would open the Atlantic to oil and gas development and the Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) proposal to issue Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA) permits to five companies to conduct seismic testing off the coast of New Jersey. I urge you not to open the Atlantic to development and drilling. If drilling is expanded and these applications are approved, the companies who receive these permits would be able to conduct testing in areas regularly used by people or inhabited by endangered marine wildlife, areas which are of critical economic importance to the state of New Jersey.

Much of New Jersey's economy is built on access to clean and safe water. From the \$45 billion the state receives from tourism on our beaches, to the \$8 billion brought in from commercial fishing, hundreds of thousands of individuals rely on the shore for their livelihood. In the event of an oil spill, the prevailing currents of the Atlantic Ocean would bring oil directly onto the beaches and towns that support these industries. Even a minor spill could cause catastrophic long-term effects on the economic prosperity of residents.

According to several reports, the methods of testing—which include firing large blasts of air 100,000 times more intense than a jet engine at the ocean floor—can occur as often as every 10 seconds and have been shown to disrupt fragile marine ecosystems. Wildlife that rely on their own sonar for movement, such as whales, are disoriented, deafened and possibly killed by these blasts. The destruction of the ecosystem also reaches the fish populations that commercial fisheries rely on, gutting supply and leading to loss of employment for the region.

I urge you to consider the damage that opening the Atlantic to new offshore oil and gas development and the issuance of these permits will have on the people, wildlife and economic prosperity of New Jersey and to reject opening the Atlantic to offshore oil and gas development and the applications for permits for seismic testing off our coast.

Sincerely,

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress

Co-Chairman of the following Congressional Member Organizations: Task Force on Alzheimer's Disease • Bi-Partisan Coalition for Combating Anti-Semitism
Lyme Disease Caucus • Coalition for Autism Research and Education • Bi-Partisan Congressional Pro-Life Caucus • Bosnia Caucus • Poland Caucus
Ad Hoc Congressional Committee for Irish Affairs • Congressional Caucus on Human Trafficking • Vietnam Caucus • Congressional Heart and Stroke Coalition

