

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 28, 2018

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

Dear Secretary Zinke:

The Gulf of Mexico has long been a vital region for U.S. oil and natural gas production, driving the United States' position as the number one oil and natural gas producer in the world and making energy for all Americans increasingly more affordable and secure. The Gulf is also considered one of the most important regions for future production due to existing infrastructure, including pipelines, refineries and supporting industries. Gulf of Mexico offshore production directly employs tens of thousands in our states, and indirectly supports hundreds of thousands of jobs. It also provides critical revenue to our state budgets for priorities such as coastal restoration, education and transportation. Consequently, we support the Department's recognition of the Gulf's role in future offshore leasing planning and ask that the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Draft Proposed Program analyze and consider all areas of the Gulf of Mexico as it moves forward with the 2019-2024 lease planning process.

The Gulf of Mexico plays a central role in the future of U.S. energy production. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), federal offshore Gulf of Mexico oil production accounts for 17 percent of U.S. crude oil production and 5 percent of U.S. natural gas production. In addition, over 45 percent of the total U.S. petroleum refining capacity and 51 percent of total U.S. natural gas processing plant capacity is located along the Gulf coast. The infrastructure, skilled workforce and supporting industries are already in place and drive our state economies. It is only natural to look to the waters off our coast as the next frontier for energy security.

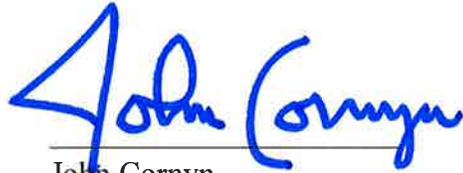
For decades, Gulf of Mexico production has supplied oil and natural gas in a vast network of pipelines up and down the coast and all across the country, delivering U.S. consumers with affordable and reliable energy. This production network coexists in the Gulf with an active U.S. military presence, robust shipping in and out of thriving ports, healthy commercial and recreational fishing industries, and off the coast of beautiful beaches and coastal tourist destinations.

As an energy superpower, our nation is more energy secure and better shielded from foreign regimes that use energy as a tool against our national security priorities. We are better today because of U.S. energy production. In order to continue this success, we should analyze all new areas including the Eastern Gulf of Mexico planning area, to make better, more informed decisions as the lease planning process continues.

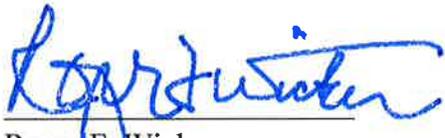
Sincerely,



Bill Cassidy, M.D.  
United States Senator



John Cornyn  
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker  
United States Senator



John Kennedy  
United States Senator



Thad Cochran  
United States Senator



Richard Shelby  
United States Senator