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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 7, 2019

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dr. Walter Cruickshank
Acting Director
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dr. Timothy Gallaudet
Assistant Secretary for Oceans and
Atmosphere
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Acting Secretary Bernhardt, Secretary Ross, Dr. Cruickshank, and Dr. Gallaudet,

I am writing to request a briefing about the recent decision to open the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) for review under a new oil and gas leasing program from 2019-2024. I also request an in person briefing on the issuance of permits for geological and geophysical surveying in the Mid-Atlantic OCS region.

The OCS off the coast of North Carolina is one of significant economic and ecological importance. Our coast is the meeting point between the Gulf Stream and the Labrador Current, which creates a unique environment that has allowed our recreational and commercial fishing industries to diversify and become regional economic drivers. As stated in the 2019-2024 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program (DPP), North Carolina accounts for over 50% of the “recreational fishing expenditures [that] resulted in a total value added in the Mid-Atlantic economy of more than \$2 billion.” Furthermore, North Carolina’s commercial fishing industry was valued at over \$96 million in 2017.

Tourism is another strong economic driver in our coastal communities. The coastal tourism industry in North Carolina generates over \$3.5 billion each year and, in 2017, tourism expenditures exceeded \$1 billion in Dare County alone. This county is of particular sensitivity to OCS surveying activities, as the narrowest portion of the Atlantic continental shelf extends just 20 miles off Cape Hatteras in Dare County, North Carolina.

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While I understand that there are potential economic benefits coming from offshore energy production, I would like to hear more details about specific actions your agencies are taking to safeguard longstanding industries in our coastal communities. I also request that you provide information about how your agencies will guarantee that the issuance of geological and geophysical surveying permits are limited and do not result in duplicative surveying activities.

Lastly, I would like to invite you to join me in visiting North Carolina for listening and education sessions across our coastal counties on the topic of offshore energy exploration. North Carolina's coastal communities have been closely monitoring the issue of offshore drilling and surveying. A visit will provide an opportunity for your agencies to directly engage with stakeholders in an open dialogue about the potential costs and benefits of your proposed actions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thom Tillis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Thom Tillis
U.S. Senator