32 NATIONAL AND STATE RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO INTERIOR SECRETARY: OFFSHORE DRILLING POSES “UNACCEPTABLE RISKS TO GOD’S OCEANS AND COASTAL COMMUNITIES”

New Letter Highlights Faith-Based Objections to the Expansion of Offshore Drilling and Seismic Testing Along U.S. Coasts; Signers Include: Presiding Bishop of the Communion of Synodal Catholic Churches; Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Director, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; and Dr. James Blassingame, President, Baptist Educational and Missionary Convention of South Carolina.

WASHINGTON, D.C./June 21, 2017///More than thirty religious leaders have outlined to Secretary of the Department of the Interior Ryan Zinke their opposition to the expansion of offshore drilling and seismic testing in the Arctic, Atlantic, Eastern Gulf of Mexico and Pacific waters. The letter to Secretary Zinke is available online at: www.nrpe.org/uploads/2/4/4/7/24473122/zinke_offshore_drilling_final.pdf

The 32 signing religious groups and leaders maintain that as a steward of God’s oceans, beaches, marine life and coastal communities, the United States government should honor and preserve these coastal resources.

The letter to Secretary Zinke states: “As religious leaders, we write in opposition to expanded oil and gas drilling and seismic testing in public waters off our nation’s coasts. Offshore drilling brings unacceptable risks to God’s oceans and coastal communities.”

“God created the oceans with an abundance of life and, as stewards of God’s earth, we should work to preserve and protect God’s marine creation. As people of faith, we also uphold our duty to love our neighbors. Oceans provide food sources and livelihoods for millions in the U.S. and globally. Drilling not only impacts marine life, but also impacts people who depend upon the oceans for food and jobs.”

“Expanding drilling into our Arctic, Atlantic, Eastern Gulf of Mexico and Pacific waters — still largely unspoiled by drilling’s inherent hazards and harms — would put our coastal residents, businesses, oceans, and climate at grave risk. Exposing the Gulf of Mexico to additional drilling would further burden residents with the pollution and risks that have already caused great, lasting harm to the region. These burdens the faith community knows well since we served as first responders during the crisis.”

“Expanded drilling threatens the beaches and wildlife that depend on a healthy ocean. It is well known that oil spills can wreak havoc on ecosystems and local businesses and residents alike. Seismic testing that often precedes offshore oil and gas development also harms marine life, including imperiled sea mammals and important fisheries.”

“Instead of expanded fossil fuel drilling in God’s oceans, we should invest in renewable sources such as wind and solar, as well as maximize our energy efficiency. God entrusts the earth to our care. We should honor this sacred duty, not by more extensive drilling for a limited energy source, but by making wiser energy choices. These energy sources are clean, provide good jobs and position our country as a global leader in energy stewardship.”

“Far more people in the United States want to preserve God’s oceans than exploit them for oil and gas. Jeopardizing the health of our oceans for more drilling will only leave us vulnerable to disasters that put God’s oceans, beaches, marine life, and livelihoods at risk.”
“We urge you to join us as God’s steward of the oceans and to respect the local residents, businesses, and millions of Americans who have already made clear their support for preserving, not drilling off our nation’s beaches.”

The letter from 32 state and national faith leaders follows President Trump’s April 28th Executive Order that would establish a so-called “America-First Offshore Energy Strategy” that specifically directs the Department of the Interior to revise the current five-year leasing program (covering 2017-2022) to include annual lease sales “to the maximum extent permitted by law” in each of the following areas: Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, Chukchi Sea, Beaufort Sea, and Cook Inlet, as well as in the Western Gulf of Mexico, and Central Gulf of Mexico.

On June 4th, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) took the first steps to expanding offshore drilling by proposing permits for large-scale seismic oil and gas exploration off the mid-Atlantic and south Atlantic coasts.

The full list of letter signers includes:

Bishop Steven M. Rosczewski  
Presiding Bishop  
Communion of Synodal Catholic Churches  
Safety Harbor, FL

Rev. Sandy Sorensen  
Director  
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries Washington Office  
Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner  
Director  
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Bishop Carroll Baltimore  
President/CEO  
Global Alliance Interfaith Networks  
Lorton, VA

Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston  
Executive Director  
Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)

Rev. Richard Killmer  
Office of Social Justice, Christian Reformed Church in North America  
Yarmouth, Maine

Rev. Dr. Russ Meyer  
Executive Director  
Florida Council of Churches  
Tampa, FL

Dr. James Blassingame  
President, Baptist Educational and Missionary Convention of South Carolina  
Board Member, South Carolina Christian Action Council
Rev. Dr. Jonathan Barton  
General Minister, Virginia Council of Churches  
Virginia Council of Churches  
Midlothian, VA

Bee Moorhead  
Executive Director  
Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy/Texas Impact

Rev. Doris Hicks  
Cleave’s Memorial C.M.E. Church

Rev. Willie Israel  
Moravian Church, Southern Province  
Longwood, FL

William Brackett  
Plymouth Harbor resident conservation committee  
Sarasota, FL

Rev. Connie Insley  
Maine Conference United Church of Christ  
Bangor, ME

Rev. Allison Smith  
United Church of Christ  
Harpswell, ME

Rev. Bill Wealand  
Retired Clergy  
United Church of Christ  
Daytona Beach, FL

Rev. Dr. George Dole  
New Jerusalem Church of Bath  
Bath, ME

Rev. Susan Sherwood  
United Church of Christ  
St. Petersburg, FL

Rev. Tamara Torres-McGovern  
United Church of Christ  
Maine

Rev. Dr. Dieter Hessel  
Presbyterian Minister  
Cape Elizabeth, ME
Rev. Donald H. Ashmall  
Council Minister  
International Council of Community Churches  
Gouldsboro, ME  
Edward Schreiber  
Retired Lutheran Pastor  
Topsham, ME

Rick Joye  
Founder/Executive Director, Sustaining Way  
Greenville, SC

Linda C. Ott  
Director  
South Carolina Interfaith Power and Light

Rev. Nancy Allison  
Holy Covenant United Church of Christ  
Charlotte, NC

Renee Hayes  
United Methodist Women  
Salida, CO

Rev. Dr. Dee Cooper  
Pastor Head of Staff, Church of the Hills  
Presbyterian Church USA  
Denver, CO

Gary Smith  
Former Director, GSK  
Community UCC  
Raleigh, NC

Stephanie Palmer-Smith  
Director of Religious Exploration, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia  
Columbia, SC

Rev. Kelly Whitman  
United Church of Christ  
Saco, ME

The Rev. Alfonso Narvaez  
Episcopal Church  
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