

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
Harpwell, 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
Reston, VA

Minister Marvin Ellison
Bangor Theological Seminary/Presbyterian Church (USA)
Portland, ME

MEDIA CONTACT: Alex Frank, (703) 276-3264 or afrank@hastingsgroup.com.