

Opening Statement of Rep. Edward J. Markey
Natural Resources Committee Oversight Hearing on 5-year OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Plan
May 9, 2012

The beloved children's writer Maurice Sendak passed away yesterday, but here in the Natural Resources Committee witnesses still get to come to the place where the wild questions are. So welcome, Director Beaudreau, to the place where proponents of drilling gnash their terrible teeth, show their terrible claws, and roar their terrible roars!

But before we let the wild rumpus start, let's just consider a few facts.

The Interior Department's proposed five-year offshore drilling plan would make more than 75 percent of our offshore oil and gas reserves available for drilling.

Oil production has increased under the Obama Administration. In fact, last year, offshore oil production was as high or higher than it was during each of the last three years of the Bush Administration.

Oil companies are drilling in the Gulf. In fact, there are now nearly one-third more floating rigs working in the Gulf than there were before the BP spill. By the end of the year there will be nearly 50 percent more floating drilling rigs, according to industry analysts.

But the Interior Department's plan for offshore drilling is only one aspect of the "all of the above" energy plan we should be debating. We need a plan to end excessive Wall Street speculation in oil markets. We need a plan to get oil companies to start drilling on the tens of millions of acres they already have under lease and to ensure that they are doing so safely. We need a plan to ensure that American fuel and natural gas stays here to help American consumers and is not just exported.

Yet the Republican Majority in the House tried to cut the funding for the Commodity Futures Trading Commission -- the cops on the Wall Street speculation beat -- by 30 percent last year. The Majority should end its opposition to fully funding the CFTC Wall Street cops to end excessive speculation in oil markets and protect consumers.

The Majority has also opposed Democratic efforts to get oil companies to start drilling on the leases they already have. Oil companies already hold the offshore drilling rights to an area the size of Kentucky on which they are not producing oil. Last year, the Interior Department found that there was nearly as much oil and more natural gas under these nonproducing leases than we could ever get from drilling up and down the East and West Coasts.

The Majority has refused to debate legislation that I have introduced to implement the recommendations of the independent BP Spill Commission improve the safety of offshore drilling. The Spill Commission recently gave Congress a grade of "D" on its legislative response to the worst environmental disaster in American history, and only refrained from handing out an "F" because it didn't want "to insult the whole institution."

And the Majority has repeatedly voted down Democratic amendments to ensure that the oil and natural gas produced from public lands here in the United States stays here to benefit American consumers, even as oil companies exported more than 1 billion barrels of American fuel last year.

The increase in gas prices we saw this spring was not the result of the White House, it was the result of Wall Street speculators. It was not about Obama, it was about OPEC.

The Interior Department's "all of the above" energy strategy includes a five-year offshore drilling plan but it also includes permitting five times the amount of renewable energy approved by all previous administrations combined. It is part of a larger strategy that has reduced our dependence on foreign oil from 57 percent at the end of the Bush Administration to 45 percent last year.

But once again, those on the other side of the aisle appear focused solely on a "drill, baby, drill" strategy that only benefits Big Oil. It is time to debate the other pieces of a real energy plan that benefits American consumers and our economy.