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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

April 27, 2011

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The Honorable John A. Boehner
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Office of the Speaker
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner:

Over the past month, gas prices have increased 28 cents per gallon and now stand at a nationwide average of \$3.88 per gallon. As we approach the summer driving season, it is imperative that we take action to provide relief to American consumers, families and businesses.

It is reportedly your intention to bring offshore drilling legislation to the House Floor next week that would do nothing to help consumers at the pump. The Republican legislation also embodies the same speed over safety, pre-BP spill mentality that led to the worst environmental disaster in our nation's history last year in the Gulf of Mexico.

I therefore urge you to immediately bring legislation to a vote in the House of Representatives that would actually address high gas prices and help consumers, that would ensure Big Oil is paying its fair share, and that would improve the safety of offshore drilling and pressure oil companies to drill for the billions of barrels of oil they currently are holding hostage from the American people.

H.R. 1017, the Enhanced SPR Act, would help consumers at the pump by deploying at least 30 million barrels of oil from our nation's Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), which is currently at capacity. Releasing oil from the SPR is proven to reduce oil prices. When President George H. W. Bush deployed oil from the SPR in 1991 oil prices immediately fell by more than 33 percent. When President Clinton conducted a timed exchange of oil from the SPR in 2000, it again reduced prices by nearly 19 percent. And when President George W. Bush released oil from the reserve in 2005 following Hurricane Katrina, oil prices fell by more than 9 percent.

Releasing a fraction of oil from the SPR now would help curb the excessive speculation in oil markets and help consumers at the pump this driving season. In addition, H.R. 927, would improve our national security by modernizing the reserve to better protect us against refinery outages resulting from natural disasters like hurricanes or a supply disruption from countries like Venezuela.

I have introduced legislation, H.R. 501, with other Democratic Ranking Members to implement the recommendations of the independent BP spill commission. The BP commission found that the root causes of the spill were “systemic” to the entire oil industry and that the fatality rate for companies operating offshore in the United States is four times what it is in Europe. Thus far, the Natural Resources Committee has taken no action on this legislation and Congress has not enacted a single legislative reform following the BP oil spill. We must ensure that we take the lessons of the BP spill and turn them into laws to protect our workers, our economy, and our environment.

H.R. 927, the USE IT Act, would provide an incentive for oil companies to begin drilling for the billions of barrels of oil they can produce now, but instead have been holding hostage from the American consumer. Right now, oil companies have 79 million acres of public land onshore and offshore under lease. However, they are only producing oil on 18.5 million of those acres. A recent analysis by the Department of the Interior concluded that this public land that oil companies are currently sitting on offshore contains nearly as much oil and more natural gas than we could ever produce from drilling up and down the entire East and West Coasts. Oil companies should begin producing the billion of barrels of oil they already hold the drilling rights to before asking Congress to open up additional public lands.

And finally, I urge you to bring to the Floor H.R. 601, the End Big Oil Tax Subsidies Act of 2011, which I introduced with Rep. Earl Blumenauer. As American consumers are suffering through high gas prices, they should not also continue to subsidize Big Oil to drill with billions of dollars per year in tax breaks. As the largest oil companies are reporting some of the largest profits we have ever seen, it is unconscionable that we would continue to subsidize them on the backs of American taxpayers. By repealing the tax breaks for the largest oil companies it would allow us to invest that revenue in developing alternatives that can help consumers at the pump or reduce the federal budget deficit.

These four bills would actually provide relief this summer to American consumers, improve the safety of offshore drilling and ensure that oil companies stop holding hostage billions of barrels of American oil, and end the billions of dollars per year in tax subsidies currently given to Big Oil companies. I therefore urge you to bring these bills to the floor of the House of Representatives for a vote immediately.

In addition, I urge you to reject any attempts to cut funding for renewable energy technologies that can create jobs here in America and lessen our dependence on foreign oil. The Republican budget proposes to reduce investment in alternative energy technologies by 90 percent at the same time that it maintains tax breaks and free drilling for Big Oil. We must invest

in the clean energy jobs that will power our recovery and end OPEC's stranglehold on our economy.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
Ranking Democratic Member

cc. The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources