



**NATURAL
RESOURCES**
COMMITTEE • DEMOCRATS
RANKING MEMBER, EDWARD J. MARKEY

OPENING STATEMENT OF REP. EDWARD J. MARKEY

Natural Resources Committee OVERSIGHT HEARING NOVEMBER 16, 2011

Mr. Secretary, it is a pleasure to welcome you back to the Natural Resources Committee.

Last week, the Interior Department released a new five year plan for domestic offshore oil and gas drilling.

I am pleased that the plan protects the East Coast, and especially New England, from offshore drilling for at least the next five years. The BP oil spill in the Gulf has many on the East Coast renewing their opposition to drilling.

However, I am concerned that the plan does include new lease sales off of Alaska, even though the oil industry hasn't effectively proven that they can respond to a spill in the icy, harsh conditions offshore in the Arctic. As one example of the threats faced in Alaskan waters, just last weekend much of Alaska was thrashed with a super storm that produced 40 foot waves and 100 mile per hour winds.

While the Administration has delayed those Arctic lease sales until 2015, I will continue to monitor the progress the industry makes in developing its response capabilities, and ensure that the Interior Department is holding the industry to the highest safety standards in this sensitive area.

But all in all, this new five-year plan means that more than 75 percent of all the offshore oil and gas resources in the United States will be made available to oil and gas companies.

Yet, the Republican Majority continues to claim that the Administration is locking up our resources.

In reality, domestic oil production is at its highest level in nearly a decade. Offshore oil production is higher than it was during the final years of the Bush Administration. And natural gas production is at an all time high.

The great irony is that it is the Republican Majority that is blocking access to the real resources the American people need right now: additional revenue to reduce our budget deficit.

It is the Republican Majority that is protecting the billions of dollars we could retrieve from making oil and gas companies pay their fair share for drilling on our public lands. It is the Republican Majority that has opposed Democratic efforts to close free drilling loopholes, and end unnecessary tax breaks. It is the Republican Majority that has consistently voted against reforming the 1872 Mining Law to require mining companies to pay a royalty to mine for gold, uranium, or other minerals on public lands.

By protecting oil companies and preventing the government from collecting the revenue it is rightfully owed for the exploitation of our public resources, Congressional Republicans are making our debt negotiations look worse than the NBA lockout.

Later this week, the Energy and Minerals Subcommittee will hold a hearing on several Republican bills that would give away more public lands, including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, to pay for a transportation bill. Those bills won't even come close to paying for the maintenance of our roads and bridges, but they will grease the skids for the oil companies to continue making record profits. This Republican scheme is both short on funds and a bridge too far.

But that is not stopping the Republican Majority from trying to use funding our transportation projects as an excuse to railroad giveaways to special interests through the Congress.

Enough is enough. Rather than balancing our budget on the backs of our seniors and millions of Americans who are struggling, we should be ensuring that oil companies are paying their fair share. That is why I am introducing legislation today that will end the free ride for oil, gas and mining companies on public land. My legislation would reduce the deficit by nearly \$19 billion over the next 10 years just by ending taxpayer-funded giveaways for these companies.

Rather than complaining about a five year drilling plan that opens up more areas than oil companies could ever drill in that time, the Republican Majority should join Democrats in creating the ten year plan we need to reduce our deficit and pay down our debt.

I look forward to hearing from the Secretary, and yield back.

MEDIA CONTACT: Eben Burnham-Snyder, Natural Resources Committee Minority Staff, Ranking Member Edward J. Markey, **202-225-6065**