Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 11, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We write in strong opposition to your announcement on Thursday, January 4th, that the Department of the Interior would move forward with the National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program (National OCS Program) for 2019 – 2024, a proposal that would allow lease sales for offshore oil and gas drilling in the North Atlantic region. We also take issue with your decision to exempt only Florida from expanded offshore drilling, and request that New Hampshire similarly be immediately exempted from any new oil and gas leases as part of this proposed plan. This reckless proposal poses a significant risk to seacoast communities in New Hampshire and would negatively affect marine ecosystems and our environment. Furthermore, this expansion threatens the vitality and economic interests of New Hampshire's commercial fishing industry that depends on access to clean and healthy oceans.

The proposed drilling plan offered by your department aims to advance the interests of the oil and gas industry at the expense of our nation's most treasured oceanic resources. At a time when America needs to move towards a clean energy economy that is less dependent on fossil fuels, your department's proposal to rapidly expand oil and gas exploration is a move in the wrong direction and fails to consider the rising ocean levels and marine life migrations that have been attributed to climate change.

New Hampshire is home to an expansive, yet delicate commercial fishing industry that has supported small boat fisherman for centuries. The announcement from your department has the potential to significantly disrupt the very nature of these enterprises and jeopardizes the economic livelihood of fishermen in New Hampshire. Furthermore, New Hampshire's seacoast offers numerous tourist attractions that support small businesses and contribute millions of dollars in economic activity to our communities. The threat of an oil spill as a result of renewed drilling activity would put jobs at risk and destroy our pristine coastline that attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors every single year.

The North Atlantic region has no existing lease sales for oil and gas development, and there have been no sales along the entire Atlantic seaboard since 1983. Granite Staters would like to keep it that way. As your Department begins to accept public comments in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, we urge you to listen to the voices of our constituents and remove the New Hampshire coastline from this misguided proposal. Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

CC: Governor Christopher Sununu