

April 13, 2021

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

As the Department of Interior (DOI) continues to consider the future of the federal oil and gas program as part of President Biden's bold agenda on climate change, it is critical that decision makers remain thoughtful about the serious consequences for American jobs and the health of our nation's energy economy. As someone who supported the president's candidacy and views his election as a refreshing change from the last four years, I have grown worried that monumental decisions being made by the administration, including decisions on DOI's oil and gas program, have lost focus on these important factors.

For example, should the president, through DOI, sustain his moratorium on issuing oil and gas leases on federal lands and waters, thousands of jobs in my home state of Louisiana and in other Gulf Coast economies will be threatened. A Louisiana Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association analysis last fall, in fact, found that such a moratorium would cost 48,000 jobs in Louisiana alone by 2022. As Louisiana's governor, John Bel Edwards, explains, "The continued leasing and development of oil and natural gas in the Gulf of Mexico is critical not only to the coastal Gulf states that host the infrastructure and support industries for the Gulf OCS exploration, but to the economy and energy security of the nation as a whole."

Combating climate change must be a high priority and the Biden administration should be commended for proposing bold action, but halting federal leasing could actually be counterproductive. An analysis by the American Petroleum Institute found that a leasing ban on new and existing permits would cause [U.S. coal use to increase by 15% by 2030](#), a departure from the path the U.S. is currently on, which involves aggressive switching from coal to gas. Because of the transition to natural gas, there was a 10% decrease in net nationwide greenhouse gas emissions from 2005 to 2018. The same time period also saw the U.S. reduce harmful emissions by 57%, but a federal leasing ban could reverse decades of progress our country has made in reducing its carbon footprint.

A federal leasing ban would walk back progress on conservation, too, as DOI recently [announced](#) \$249 million for Gulf states for coastal conservation, restoration, and hurricane protection programs, including nearly \$88 million for Louisiana. This funding, which is central to state-run conservation efforts, could be jeopardized because of the federal leasing ban, endangering conservation efforts in my state, as well as Alabama, Mississippi and Texas. For example, Louisiana uses such funding for outdoor recreation, public parks, supporting the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, and protecting places such as the Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge.

Beyond the Gulf, states like New Mexico would also suffer, with New Mexico's Democratic Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan [voicing concerns](#) that they have asked for "financial assistance to offset the impact of the moratorium and give certainty as they plan for the future, and explained that New Mexico might also need more time to transition away from drilling." If the administration sustains its leasing ban, eight Western states could [face tax losses of more than \\$110 billion](#) and state governments would see lease-generated royalties and tax revenues that fund public services such as education and police disappear.

To preserve years of bipartisan support for oil and gas exploration on federal lands, President Biden and DOI should strongly consider reversing course on a federal leasing ban, focusing on climate change solutions that don't sacrifice thousands of jobs and billions in revenue from the oil and gas industry. Allowing oil exploration and drilling on federal lands was a winning formula for President Obama and it can be for the Biden administration as well. In fact, it was President Obama who [stated in 2012](#), "We've opened up public lands. We're actually drilling more on public lands than in the previous administration...And natural gas isn't just appearing magically. We're encouraging it and working with the industry." The Biden administration, and specifically the Department of Interior, would be wise to continue this record.

Sincerely,

Charlie Melancon
Former Democratic Member of Congress from Louisiana (2005 – 2011)
Former Louisiana Secretary of Wildlife and Fisheries (2016)

Enclosure:

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/opinion/article_3e77ac6c-90cc-11eb-a509-0f8a6a95efd3.html

Charlie Melancon: I was a Joe Biden supporter, but question his oil and gas phobia

March 30, 2021

Since Day One, President Joe Biden has taken action to fulfill his bold energy agenda. While the Biden administration has good intentions regarding their commitment to action on climate change, it is important to first take a pause and assess the consequences of these monumental decisions. I supported Biden's candidacy and thought he would be a refreshing change from the last four years, but I worry about the consequences of some of his actions.

Biden's recent moratorium on issuing oil and gas leases on federal lands and waters has the potential to threaten thousands of jobs and be severely detrimental to Louisiana and

other Gulf Coast regional economies. A Louisiana Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association analysis last fall warned of the negative consequences from a proposed ban on federal leasing on natural gas and oil development on public lands and waters, projecting the Gulf Coast region would be among the hardest-hit areas with 48,000 job losses in Louisiana alone by 2022. This ban will harm states like Louisiana that develop their federal offshore waters in a safe and responsible way.

As Louisiana's governor, John Bel Edwards, recently pointed out, "The continued leasing and development of oil and natural gas in the Gulf of Mexico is critical not only to the coastal Gulf states that host the infrastructure and support industries for the Gulf OCS exploration, but to the economy and energy security of the nation as a whole. We look forward to learning more about the Biden administration's plan and working together to achieve responsible energy exploration and production."

It is apparent the Biden administration is focused on combating climate change which we can all agree should be a top priority. However, halting federal leasing could actually have the opposite effect. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, there has been a 10% decrease in net nationwide greenhouse gas emissions from 2005 to 2018, in large part due to a shift to natural gas for generating electricity. The United States has already seen a positive effect from shifting to natural gas, as our country has reduced emissions 57% more compared to emissions reductions from renewables over that same time period. A federal leasing ban could reverse decades of progress our country has made in reducing its carbon footprint and cause emissions from power generation to increase, as a result of a shift back to coal.

It is also important to consider the benefits federal leasing has on our country's conservation efforts. The Land and Water Conservation Fund relies on offshore oil and gas development to supply billions of dollars for state-run conservation programs. In Louisiana, this includes outdoor recreation, public parks, wildlife preserves, and the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Louisiana has received approximately \$224.1 million in LWCF funding over the past five decades, protecting places such as the Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge. This funding could be jeopardized as a result of the leasing ban.

Louisiana and Gulf States are not the only part of the country that would feel the effects of the new federal leasing ban. In fact, New Mexico's governor recently expressed concerns regarding the ban's impact on her state.

New Mexico's Democratic Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan also voiced concerns about the ban, and recently told Reuters that "they have asked for financial assistance to offset the impact of the moratorium and give certainty as they plan for the future, and explained that New Mexico might also need more time to transition away from drilling."

As the United States has no firm plans to reduce its demand for energy, we must remain committed to supporting an "all-of-the-above energy approach" that includes natural gas, nuclear and the continued development of renewables. We can find innovative

solutions to combating climate change, without sacrificing thousands of jobs and billions in revenue from the oil and gas industry. Biden should reconsider this federal leasing ban; reversing course is a key opportunity for bipartisanship and clear economic benefit for several states across the country attempting to rebound post-pandemic.

Charlie Melancon, a former Democratic member of Congress and Louisiana Secretary of Wildlife and Fisheries, now works with the pro-infrastructure group Grow America's Infrastructure Now (GAIN) Coalition.