

Alaska Inter-Tribal Council · Blue Frontier · Center for Biological Diversity · Clean Ocean Action · Colorado Ocean Coalition · Friends of the Earth · Friends of the Sea Otter · Gulf Coast Environmental Defense · Hands Across the Sand · Ocean Conservation Research · Public Citizen · SC Coastal Conservation League · Surfrider Foundation · The Ocean Foundation · WildEarth Guardians

November 24, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell
United States Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

Bureau of Ocean Energy Management Acting Director Walter Cruickshank
United States Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel
United States Department of Defense
Washington, D.C.

Dear President Obama,

On behalf of our members and activists, we write to express our serious objection to the “closed” November 6th meeting held at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh, North Carolina, to discuss energy exploration on the Outer Continental Shelf off the mid-Atlantic coast. Meetings about energy development that include groups with ties to the oil and gas industry while excluding the public run counter to your promise to maintain a transparent government and Secretary Jewell’s repeated calls for stakeholder input regarding offshore energy development. In fact, this meeting is alarmingly reminiscent of the Bush-Cheney energy panels.

In response to a letter¹ from environmental groups requesting an audience at the meeting, the North Carolina Department of Energy and Natural Resources stated that the meeting was “strictly informational and educational,” and limited to federal and state agencies and elected officials in order to “avoid any potential for real or perceived conflicts of interest.” However, the participation of groups such as the Center for Offshore Safety, Consumer Energy Alliance, and Institute for Energy Research, all of which have ties to the oil and gas industry, reveal a clear bias in favor of offshore energy development over an open, honest discussion about all of its

¹ Letter to Donald van der Vaart, Deputy Secretary and Energy Policy Advisor. November 5, 2014. Environmental group signees included Cape Fear River Watch, Environment North Carolina, NC Conservation Network, NC League of Conservation Voters, Southern Environmental Law Center, and Western North Carolina Alliance.

potential consequences. The voices of those who are concerned about the risks of offshore oil and gas development on their economy, environment, and quality of life, were deliberately silenced. In fact, North Carolina State Representative Pricey Harrison (D-Guilford), who was in attendance, said the meeting was all pro and no con. Reporters were only allowed to attend the end of the meeting to hear remarks by North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory, an outspoken supporter of oil and gas exploration off the North Carolina coast.

This meeting was a déjà vu for those who remember former Vice President Dick Cheney's Energy Task Force, which held a number of similar closed meetings under the guise of responsible energy development, and shielded from outside influence. In reality, they were a direct line of communication from the fossil fuel energy industry to the White House, with environmental groups given one conciliatory meeting, from which Vice President Cheney was absent.

Holding a meeting in a public venue to discuss the potential development of public resources in a room that is closed to the public but open to industry is disingenuous and undemocratic. As stated by the North Carolina Sierra Club, "We can't recall any other Administration convening a meeting of public officials to talk about a public process for developing public resources, held in a public location that is closed to the public."²

We are deeply concerned by the taxpayer-funded federal agencies attending this meeting and ask that the Administration and the agencies stay true to their promise of transparency and public participation by refusing to participate in meetings regarding energy development of public resources that exclude the public in the future.

Sincerely,

Delice Calcote
Executive Director
Alaska Inter-Tribal Council

David Helvarg
Executive Director
Blue Frontier

Miyoko Sakashita
Oceans Director
Center for Biological Diversity

Cindy Zipf
Executive Director

² Beisecker, M. NC officials host closed meeting on oil drilling. *Energy Guardian*. Nov. 7, 2014.

Clean Ocean Action

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