

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva,

On behalf of our members and activists, we write to voice our opposition to H.R. 5577, which would amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to allow for internet-based oil and natural gas leasing. Continuing to lease more of our nation's Outer Continental Shelf for oil and gas drilling puts coastal communities and wildlife in harm's way while ensuring our dependence on the fossil fuels that are driving the global climate crisis for decades more. The American public has recognized that new leasing is incongruent with climate action goals and any move towards online auctions is a step in the wrong direction because it robs the public of the opportunity to openly and directly participate in an important stage of the leasing process.

Government leasing decisions must be as transparent and accountable to the American people as possible. This can only be ensured by allowing the public to openly and directly participate in every step of the leasing process, from the environmental review to the sale itself.

Full and direct participation is critical to ensure people are given the opportunity to voice and demonstrate their input on whether and how public waters and the minerals contained beneath them are managed. On March 23, over 300 people went to the New Orleans Superdome to participate in a lease sale for 45 million acres in the Gulf of Mexico. The opportunity to directly communicate their message of no new offshore leases and a just transition for the Gulf would be lost in an online lease sale format. Beyond the Gulf, nearly 1.4 million people recently submitted comments to the Department of the Interior calling for no new offshore drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf. The public's voices must not be marginalized, silenced, or excluded, particularly when federal leasing decisions threaten the very existence of coastal communities and adversely impact their ability to live safe and healthy lives.

The Department of the Interior is the steward of our offshore areas and the agency has a duty to manage them in the best interests of the American people. While the current offshore leasing program is far from transparent, fair and competitive, moving lease sales to an online format will only worsen these issues. As the movement to oppose new federal fossil fuel leasing grows, Congress should not be limiting, but promoting constructive dialogue about the future of federal leasing programs.

Our groups and members look forward to working with you to ensure that the federal offshore leasing program is as transparent and accountable to the people as possible by prioritizing, not undermining, public participation.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Ahtuanguak, member of the Native Village of Nuiqsuit

Delice Calcote, Executive Director  
Alaska Inter-Tribal Council

Alicia Cooke, Co-Founder  
350 Louisiana, New Orleans Chapter

James Crowell  
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Mary Gutierrez, Executive Director  
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