

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 22, 2015

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

Dear Secretary Jewell:

We are writing to express our extreme disappointment in the Administration's recent decision to approve drilling in the Chukchi Sea within the Arctic Ocean. We strongly urge the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement to halt all offshore oil and gas drilling permits in the Arctic region, one of the world's most delicate ecosystems, given the extreme and treacherous conditions, and the severely limited capacity for response and cleanup.

In reinstating Shell's Arctic drilling permit, we are concerned that the Department of Interior did not fully account for the likelihood of oil spills and the resulting cultural and environmental impacts from fossil fuel development in the Arctic region. Your agency's own analysis of Sale 193 estimated a 75 percent chance of large oil spill if the Chukchi leases are developed.

Opening development on a new fossil fuel reservoir in the Arctic not only puts the natural resources, ecosystems, and the dependent communities at risk, it also contradicts the President's Climate Action Plan to limit greenhouse gas emissions and reduce climate change. It is an unacceptable and irresponsible decision.

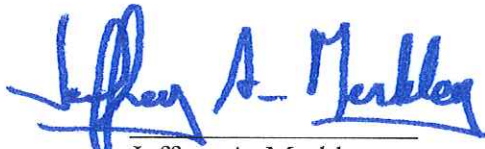
We applaud President Obama's decision earlier this year to formally withdraw critical ecological areas in the Arctic Ocean such as Barrow, Kaktovik, and along the Chukchi Sea coast. Withdrawing these areas from oil and gas development provides vital protection to cultural resources such as subsistence, fishing, and hunting areas, as well as whale migration routes. We believe similar precautions should be taken in the Chukchi Sea and throughout the Arctic.

The oil and gas industry has demonstrated inadequacies in oil spill prevention and response in challenging Arctic waters, and the region lacks the infrastructure to support either drilling operations or clean up response with adequate safety or effectiveness. As you know, Shell's previous exploration attempts in 2012 put numerous lives at risk, including those of the Coast Guard crews who handled complex and treacherous conditions to safely remove 18 people from a detached and free-floating oil rig. We advocate that Arctic leases, such as those sold in the Chukchi Sea or in the proposed 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program, should be retired or withdrawn along with Barrow and Kaktovik.

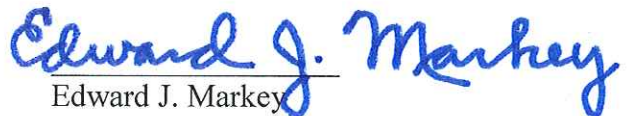
The Arctic region is home to vibrant communities, iconic wildlife, and some of the last wild places relatively untouched by industrial development. For centuries, Alaska Natives have subsisted off of the natural resources of the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas, relying on animals that live in or pass through the sea to continue their traditional subsistence way of life. It is irresponsible to jeopardize their cultural and livelihoods with risk-laden and unnecessary drilling operations.

We urge the Department of Interior to prioritize ecosystem health, the safety and cultural practices of local communities, and to prohibit drilling and leasing in the Arctic Ocean.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



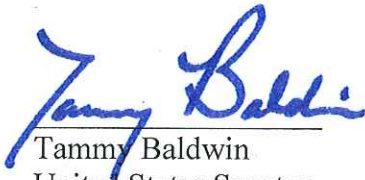
Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
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Cory A. Booker
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Charles E. Schumer
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