



May 4, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The tragedy that continues to unfold in the Gulf of Mexico demonstrates the grave risks posed by offshore oil drilling and how little we know about how to assess or mitigate those risks. Even as your Administration works to limit the damage in the Gulf, it is essential that you take action to prevent similar spills from recurring in the Gulf or elsewhere. Moreover, your continued leadership is needed at this critical moment to move the nation to a clean energy future that would reduce our need for offshore oil and eventually eliminate it. We cannot continue along as if the economic and environmental depredation in the Gulf were not happening.

The first steps, of course, are to stop the leak, contain the spill, and attend to the devastating consequences the explosion and its aftermath have had on lives and livelihoods. This will require a major effort to provide environmental remediation and relief for affected individuals and communities, and we look forward to working with you on that. Yet we must also learn from this tragedy. Oil exploration policy and energy policy more generally need to be thoroughly reviewed and reconsidered in light of the startling new facts on the ground.

With that in mind, we urge you to take the following actions concerning oil drilling:

- Impose a moratorium on all new oil drilling activities offshore. This would mean a halt to new offshore leasing, exploratory drilling, and seismic exploration, including the exploratory drilling that is scheduled to begin in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas in Alaska this summer. The moratorium should remain in effect until the causes of the current spill and their ramifications are fully understood. Existing plans to move ahead with drilling were based on the assumption that the likelihood of a serious spill was virtually too remote to contemplate. That assumption has been disproven by the catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico.

- Ensure the ground rules for future drilling reflect the lessons of the *Deepwater Horizon*. This would require suspending the processes the Administration now has underway to plan for future drilling. (Specifically, these include the receipt and review of public comments on the current (2007-2012) and next (2012-2017) five-year plans, on Lease Sale 220 off of Virginia, and on geological and geophysical exploration.) The suspension should remain in effect until the causes of the current spill and their ramifications are fully understood. The processes that need to be suspended set the ground rules for off-shore oil drilling. For those ground rules to make any sense, they would have to be designed to prevent a spill like the one in the Gulf of Mexico from recurring. But no one yet knows how to do that. Therefore, the current process of soliciting and reviewing public comments cannot possibly accomplish its purpose; neither the public nor agency officials have the ability yet to evaluate the plans in light of the events in the Gulf. The processes would resume when the ground rules for future drilling could reflect what is learned from the current tragedy.
- Initiate an independent investigation to understand the demise of the *Deepwater Horizon*, the ensuing spill, and its ramifications. There are many models that an investigation could follow, but whatever form is chosen, the investigation should include experts who do not work for the government or the oil industry, and the investigation should assess the causes of the current spill, how such spills can be avoided in the future, the adequacy of containment and clean-up measures for spills generally, and the implications of these findings for drilling in, or adjacent to sensitive or ecologically important areas. The experts should issue recommendations on how to strengthen regulations to prevent spills and to protect sensitive and ecologically important areas. They should also propose criteria to determine whether areas should be excluded from leasing. The moratorium and suspensions called for above should not be lifted before the investigation has been completed.

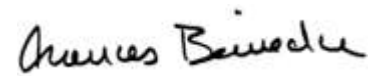
These steps would help ensure that the lessons of this disaster can be used to reform drilling policy. While the situation remains fluid, it is already clear that the status quo cannot adequately protect the public. Simply continuing along based on assumptions that have now been disproven should not be an option.

Finally, as you have often pointed out, the nation needs to move ahead to a clean energy future. We cannot remain forever addicted to oil. The only sure way to spur the innovation needed to develop and install clean energy technologies is through comprehensive energy and climate legislation. Such legislation would also have the shorter-term benefit of encouraging greater use of Enhanced Oil Recovery – a process by which we can meet more of our current oil needs by getting more oil out of existing on-shore wells, reducing demand for both imported and offshore oil. But to

pass such legislation and to capitalize on new technologies, we need you to speak even more forcefully and to work with Congress even more directly on an energy and climate bill. That's our best hope of consigning catastrophic oil spills to history rather than worrying about them in the future.

Sincerely,

Frances Beinecke

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frances Beinecke". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

President