

Letter to Congress: Oppose this drilling bill

Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2024

Dear Members of Congress and President Joe Biden:

In April 2010, the oil drilling rig “Deepwater Horizon” exploded and sank, releasing 4 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico over the next three months. This disaster endangered thousands of marine species and led to the deaths of up to 175,000 turtles and roughly 1,100 dolphins.¹ The immediate impact on ocean ecosystems was catastrophic, with oil disrupting habitats and food chains. In the decade since, American oil rigs have continued to spill oil into our waters, further threatening marine life. **When we drill, we spill.**

Despite these risks, the Energy Permitting Reform Act, introduced by Senators Manchin and Barrasso, seeks to expand oil drilling, both offshore and on land. **As young community leaders, we respectfully ask you to oppose this bill and its drilling provisions, and instead join us in protecting our oceans, wildlife and climate.**

The Energy Permitting Reform Act would lease 60 million acres of ocean, about the size of all the Great Lakes combined,² and 2 million acres of land for oil drilling annually for five years. Oil spills are particularly hazardous to marine life. When oil enters the sea, it forms a thick layer on the water’s surface, blocking sunlight and reducing oxygen levels. This disrupts the natural processes of plants and algae, which are essential to the food chain and provide oxygen to marine organisms. The ripple effect is devastating to the entire ecosystem, impacting species from the smallest algae to the largest marine animals.³

Oil drilling also harms human health. Toxic compounds from the oil accumulate in the food chain, leading to long-term health risks for humans who consume contaminated seafood.⁴

¹ *Sea Turtles, Dolphins, and Whales - 10 years after the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill*. (2021, September 10). NOAA Fisheries

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-life-distress/sea-turtles-dolphins-and-whales-10-years-after-deepwater-horizon-oil>

² *Learn about our Great Lakes*. SOM - State of Michigan. (n.d.).

[https://www.michigan.gov/egle/public/learn/great-lakes#:~:text=All%20together%2C%20the%20Great%20Lakes,square%20miles%20of%20surface%20area.94,710 sq miles = 60,614,400 acres.](https://www.michigan.gov/egle/public/learn/great-lakes#:~:text=All%20together%2C%20the%20Great%20Lakes,square%20miles%20of%20surface%20area.94,710%20sq%20miles%20=%2060,614,400%20acres.)

³ da Silva Correa, H., Blum, C. T., Galvão, F., & Maranhão, L. T. (2022). Effects of oil contamination on plant growth and development: a review. *Environmental science and pollution research international*, 29(29), 43501–43515. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-022-19939-9>

Holcomb, S. (2023, October 31). *Oil Kills*. Oceana. Retrieved September 23, 2024, from <https://oceana.org/blog/oil-kills/>

⁴ Ordinioha B, Brisibe S. The human health implications of crude oil spills in the Niger delta, Nigeria: An interpretation of published studies. *Niger Med J*. 2013 Jan;54(1):10-6. doi: 10.4103/0300-1652.108887. PMID: 23661893; PMCID: PMC3644738.

Burning oil and gas also worsens climate change. There is growing consensus that no new fossil fuel development can take place if we are to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.⁵ Drilling more today locks us into climate pollution and costs that our generation cannot afford and must avoid.⁶

Passing this bill would increase the risk of oil spills, damaging not only marine life but also contributing to the deterioration of our climate and human health. The choices we make today will shape the future of our planet. This is why we strongly urge you to act now to protect our oceans, wildlife and climate by opposing the Energy Permitting Reform Act and its drilling provisions.

Sincerely,

Natalie Macaluso, AL, President, Water and Environmental Student Association, Auburn University

Allison Collier, AZ, President, E.A.R.T.H. Club, Arizona State University:

“This issue is very important to me as I care deeply for marine life and want to stop the possibility of oil spills harming them. It also is extremely important to the future of the entire planet, so it should matter to everyone.”

McKenna Kiesling, AZ, President, Net Impact, Arizona State University: “We need to be divesting from fossil fuels and oil expansion, and deep sea drilling is dangerous to marine life and our biggest tool in the fight against climate change: the ocean.”

Abbi Baker, AZ, Vice President, Earth Club, Arizona State University:

“I am concerned for how much damage humanity has caused to Earth. Despite efforts to do better and inform people of how to individually make an impact, and although this still works, it works at a smaller scale and this is a bigger issue at hand. It is a governmental issue and a corporate issue where great change has to happen in order to see progress. The people can only do so much.”

Karina Oquendo, CA, Intern, The Public Interest Network, University of California San Diego:

“Offshore drilling is extremely disruptive to marine animals and environments. Just because we don’t see these ecosystems in our everyday lives, that doesn’t mean they don’t exist. Deep-sea and open ocean ecosystems deserve protection as much as any other!”

⁵ *The path to limiting global warming to 1.5 °C has narrowed, but clean energy growth is keeping it open* News - IEA. (2023, September 26). International Energy Agency.

⁶Casale, M. (2022, November 18). *Building fossil fuel infrastructure locks us into a higher-carbon future*. Frontier Group.

Afton Copeland Spiegel, CA, American University :

“Climate change is an urgent matter that needs immediate attention.”

Cori Lopez, CA, Coordinator, CA Youth vs. Big Oil, California State University, Monterey Bay:

“We must not allow new fossil fuel projects that cause climate change and threaten young people's future on this planet.”

Shane Wawrak, CA, Secretary, CSUF Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, California State University, Fullerton:

“This issue matters to me as a student as the consequences will affect not only my generation but many more after us. Preservation of our ocean ecosystems.”

Cole Harvey, CA, President , Baylor Club Water Polo, Member, Alpha Tau Omega, Baylor University

Jason Chen, CO, Georgia Institute of Technology:

“Clean energy and sustainability has always been an issue I want to help improve upon. My family also owns a clean energy company so it matters to them as well.”

Gaia Poneta, CO, Instructor, Environmental Learning Center, Colorado State University:

“We have enough development. It’s time for us to start protecting, caring and stewarding our planet like God intended us to. We have a responsibility to protect flora and fauna and live in better harmony with other life. Please, do your part.”

Thomas Snyder, CO, Risk Manager, Zeta Beta Tau, American University:

“Growing up in Colorado, I was able to experience the wonders of nature firsthand. I was raised in the mountains and on the lakes and rivers. Seeing wildlife in their natural habitats, and enjoying the clear, fresh air gave me a profound respect for our natural resources. I came to understand that preserving these landscapes is not only about beauty but about safeguarding the health of our communities and ensuring future generations can experience the same natural wonders I did.”

Jayden Caterina, CT, American University

Madeline Shantz, CT, Member of Sigma Kappa and AU PeaceJam, American University:

“I want the oceans to be clean for future generations and to have the best quality of life.”

Anshu Pokuru, FL, American University

Oliver Giraud, FL, Kenyon College

Ethan Halbreich, FL, Colgate College Democrats President, Colgate University

Lindsey Maschler, FL, Founder/President Run on Climate Club, University of Vermont:

“This issue matters deeply to me because it directly threatens the marine ecosystems I care about and have dedicated much of my life to protecting. Growing up in South Florida, I've always felt a strong connection to the ocean, and I've seen firsthand the devastating effects pollution can have on marine life, especially Florida's Coral Reef. As someone who has spent time under the water as a SCUBA diver since I was 10, I've felt the peace and beauty that healthy oceans bring to the world. But I've also seen the damage that oil spills and other forms of pollution inflict on these ecosystems. Beyond the environmental devastation, expanding oil drilling is a direct assault on our efforts to fight climate change. We are in a critical moment, where every choice matters, and continued reliance on fossil fuels only locks us into a future of worsening global warming. The consequences aren't theoretical—they're personal. I think about the turtles, dolphins, and fish that oil spills can kill, as well as how they cascade through the food chain and hurt communities, including those that depend on seafood for their livelihood and well-being. As a young person, the legacy of these decisions will affect my generation and future ones. We're the ones inheriting this planet, and I don't want to see it ruined for short-term profit at the expense of long-term survival. That's why this bill, which seeks to perpetuate harmful practices, matters to me and why I strongly oppose it. We need leadership that protects the environment, not one that trades it away.”

Tayara Wallin-Damon, GA, Georgia State University Clarkston Campus Earth Club, Georgia State University:

“I am an elementary education major and would also like to have children of my own one day. It doesn't matter to me as much as it matters to the children who will be inheriting this planet.”

Caleb Gustavson, GA, President, Georgia PIRG Students

Evan Price, GA, University of Georgia

William Grant, GA, University of Georgia

Rebecca Basta, GA, President, Orthodox Christian Campus Ministries, University of Georgia

Olivia Le, GA, Co-Fundraising Chair, Equal Education for Athens, University of Georgia:

“Opposing the Energy Permitting Reform Act is important because it seeks to prevent expanded oil drilling, which poses significant risks to marine ecosystems, human health, and the global climate. Oil spills not only threaten marine life by disrupting food chains and habitats, but also

harm humans through contaminated seafood and worsened air quality. Continuing to rely on fossil fuels increases long-term environmental and economic costs, affecting future generations.”

Render McLeod, GA, University of Georgia

Campbell Bellaman, IL, University of Wisconsin

Avi Silverberg, KS, President of Environmental Impact & Sustainability Society, University of Kansas:

“It’s the responsibility of an educated person to stand up for the causes they believe in. I care what happens to ocean and aquatic life, and would advocate on behalf of the cause that seeks to prevent their deaths at the hands of those willing to destroy their habitats.”

Alba Wilson-Axpe, KS, University of Kansas

Levi Lantis, KS, University of Kansas

Lukas Miles, KS, University of Kansas

Nolan Schad, KS, University of Kansas

Angelina Simmons, KS, University of Kansas

Ethan Klinock, KS, University of Kansas

Jack Shaw, KS, Leadership team/Treasurer, Sunrise KU, University of Kansas:

“The oceans are crucial to broader environmental health.”

Grant Misse, KS, Hub Leader, Sunrise KU, University of Kansas:

“Oil is no longer the most cost-efficient form of energy, and it is instead, incredibly destructive. I am 22 and would like to have a livable planet for the rest of my life.”

Leah Starr, LA, President of Epsilon Eta Sigma, Tulane University:

“Oil and gas industries are destroying our health and our planet.”

Nico Nevard, MA, American University

Emily Rotondi, MA, Boston University

Katie Adams, MA, Northeastern University:

“As someone who grew up next to the ocean, the impacts of oil spills are close to home. No matter how much technology we have, drilling will always have a spill risk involved. We need to be going in the opposite direction of this bill, towards more clean energy initiatives and less oil drilling operations.”

Mia Tierney, MA, American University

Samuel Krakower, MD, President, The American Conservation Coalition, University of Maryland: “I live on Earth and quite like the place.”

Sophia D'Alonzo, MD, President, MaryPIRG Students, University of Maryland:
“It's past time to invest in renewables and cease drilling projects.”

Nicholas Breymaier, MD, Policy & Projects Committee Chair, Sustainable Ocean Alliance, University of Maryland

Addison Bentley, MI, Director of Public Relations & Social Media, College Democrats, Central Michigan University

Carrie Lawson, MI, Central Michigan University

Charles Leighton, MI, Treasurer, College Democrats, Central Michigan University:
“Preserving the environment is essential for our future to be safe and clean. Fossil fuels are outdated and extremely harmful for the ecosystem, especially off-shore drilling.”

Meghana Karumuri, MI, Michigan State University

Holly Ciampa, MI, President, Birding Club, Michigan State University:
“This issue is important to maintain the natural ecosystem of marine life and shorebirds. Our freshwater lakes (mind you, the LARGEST freshwater lakes in the US) would be violated by unnecessary and unnatural structures causing the Great Lakes state to provide less of a home for plants, animals, and our people who work hard to maintain its natural habitat.

Duncan Darnell, MI, Member, Birding Club, Michigan State University

Cassidy Fishman, MI, Member, Birding Club, Michigan State University:
“The environment should be enjoyed and utilized by all, not only the 1%.”

Paul Hedges, MI, Former Secretary, Magic: the Gathering Club, Michigan State University:

“Climate change is one of, if not the biggest global issues, and I believe should be the United States’ priority as well. I work with the sustainability department in Lansing, MI, and the work they do combined with federal legislation is crucial for the future of this planet.”

Adam Cohen, MI, Member, MSU Birding Club, Michigan State University

Bethany Nolta, MI, Membership Chair, Spartan Sierra Club, Michigan State University:
“The Sierra Club has long stood for protecting our natural resources and ensuring equitable access to pristine natural spaces in the future.”

Kameron Motley, MI, Member, Young, Gifted, & Green, Morehouse College:
“This issue hits close to home coming from Flint, MI. I am aware of the impact on communities that decisions can have if not thought about adequately. One of Dr. Martin Luther King’s philosophies was that if there was that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, so that’s why I feel like it is important to advocate.”

Abigail Zola, MI, President, American Society of Civil Engineers Club, Eastern Michigan University:
“I am always willing to be a voice for the environment and to help in any way that I can. I fully intend to do my best to leave this Earth better than I found it for my children and all generations to come because they deserve better and most importantly the Earth and the environment deserve better.”

Melodie Marsh, MI, Member, Young Gifted and Green, Howard University

Benjamin Chin, MI, University of Michigan

Emmaline Allen, MI, President, Botany Club, Oakland University:
“This issue matters to me because I am an advocate for environmental protection and want to preserve the valuable resources we have so future generations can enjoy them.”

Toby Wieland, MN, American University

Ayomide Olajide, NC, University of North Carolina

Will Smith, NC, President, Sustainable Materials and Technology Student Association, North Carolina State

Jack Yordy, NC, Member, College Democrats, Appalachian State University:

“The effects of Hurricane Helene on Western NC have shown me that climate change is hitting home everywhere. I believe we should be combatting it, not exacerbating it.”

Xavier Laack, NH, Club Leader, Outing Club, Dartmouth University:

“Energy permitting reform is a necessary step in facilitating a speedy energy transition in the U.S., but this bill includes items that are antithetical to transitioning our fossil fuel based energy systems to renewable energy. Reducing our dependence on fossil fuels begins by not extracting more than we already are, particularly via risky methods in delicate ecosystems. I hope that energy permitting is reformed, just not by this specific illogical and dangerous bill.”

Briannah Shaw, NJ, Treasurer, Sexuality and Gender Alliance, Rutgers University:

“This issue matters to me in every way of my life, including the fact that when we do not maintain the quality of our oceans, we all suffer, and we will all die. This issue matters to every human life.”

Isabella Acosta-Jimenez, NJ, Intern at Frontier Group with PIRG, Davidson College:

“This bill is posed as one which advances renewables, but in reality, it is infringing on stakeholder engagement and makes fracking easier.”

Jacquelyn Veatch, NJ, President, Oceanography Graduate Student Association, Rutgers University

Benjamin Cowles, NY, President, Foraging and Mycology Society, Stony Brook University:

“As a marine sciences major, this is an issue that is very important to me. Conservation and respect for our global oceans is paramount to the survival of our species and the environment.”

Lauren Wilner, NY, President, Citizens’ Climate Lobby, Binghamton University

Alassane Sow, OH, President Mycological Society, Michigan State University:

“Corporate interests should not determine whether or not I can live in a safe, clean environment.”

Paul Snyder, OH, Vice President, Outdoors Club, Kenyon College

Luc Gilbreath, OH, Kenyon College:

“Securing our environmental future is the most important task we face and limiting our oil extraction helps us protect our environment.”

August Greer, OH, Captain, Serf Ultimate Frisbee, Kenyon College

Adele Cutler, OH, Kenyon College

Maddy Lucas, OH, Vice President, Sierra Student Coalition, Ohio University:

“I want to protect our oceans and the ecosystems in and around them.”

Noah Smith, OH, Member, Sierra Club, Ohio University

Mollie Kawakami, OH, Ohio University

Era Bakia, OH, Ohio University

Adam Berkheimer, OH, Ohio University:

“We need to focus on using clean energy, which is much more effective than fossil fuels and has a much smaller environmental impact.”

Shelby Davenport, OH, Ohio University:

“This issue matters to me because I believe the well-being of people and the environment (we cannot have one without the other) must be our utmost priority as a nation. This bill would damage both environmental and human health and that is not acceptable. We must decrease our energy usage, not continue to exploit the land to maintain it. Continuing to exploit will not be sustainable for our Earth, people, and economy long term.”

Jack Yirga, OH, Co President, Students for Environmental Action, Colgate University

Skylar Sarsfield, OK, University of Oklahoma:

“I care about our planet and do not want to see marine plants and animals, as well as humans, suffer from the consequences of offshore drilling.”

Wyatt Paradise, OK, Chair, Green Week, University of Oklahoma:

“This issue is incredibly important to me because I am deeply passionate about environmental sustainability. As the leader of my campus’s largest sustainability organization, and as someone who cares about the well-being of our planet, I strive to make a meaningful impact and inspire positive change.”

Finn Dollarhyde, OR, Member of South Coast Action Team Group:

“This issue matters to me. I care deeply about the quality of our water for our marine life that lives in it, not only for the animals’ sake but for the people who consume sea life. I also deeply care because oil is in no way good for the environment. There are much better ways than gas use to get around. I also deeply care about our future and if this continues our future will end sooner than expected.”

Kaitlyn Pelletier, OR, Portland Community College:

“This issue matters because oil drilling has caused nothing but harm to the eco-systems. As stated in the letter, it has been killing thousands of marine animals, destroying food-chains, and habitats. Not only does it destroy and kill, oil drilling also contributes to climate change greatly, which has a not only has a significant negative impact on animals and habits, but also people all across the world.”

Emma Watson, OR, University of Oregon:

“This act is doing no good for our environment and is only benefiting people that make money off of the gas/oil industry. For the sake of wildlife and future generations, I signed this to take a small step in stopping the Energy Permitting Reform Act to keep wildlife protected in their own home.”

Luke Sanidas, OR, University of Oregon:

“I’m passionate about the health of our marine life and our planet and want our planet to stay habitable for all forms of life.”

Addison Heim, OR, University of Oregon:

“As a young student, the future of the environment is very important to me. I would love to have a family in the future and if the environment is no longer healthy, then what is the point of putting more people on the planet? I also love to be in the ocean and love the animals in it so I would be very upset if we continued hurting it.”

Mabel Knapick, OR, American University

Kaash Goyal, PA, Vice President, SIS Undergraduate Council, American University:

“Offshore drilling is very harmful to global health and the environment, and I want to support a cause opposing it.”

Keanu Arpels-Josiah, PA, Organizer, Fridays For Future USA, Swarthmore College

Kiersten Sundel, RI, Vice President, Student Action for Sustainability, University of Rhode Island:

“It is incredibly important that we protect our oceans from offshore drilling to expand fossil fuels. Mitigating climate change depends on lowering carbon emissions that contribute to thermal expansion and glacial recession, and minimizing the use of fossil fuels is paramount in the effort for prevention!”

Olivia Diamond, SC, Vice-President, The Sustainable Fashion Club, College Of Charleston

Alice Tang, TN, President, Bird Club, Vanderbilt University

Andrew Wattanakolpant, TN, President Community Gardening Club, University of Tennessee:
“This is the most pressing and important issue facing society today.”

Toniah Anderson, TN, President, College Democrats, Austin Peay State University

Zoey Kaul, TX, President, Plant Futures, Co-Lead, Sustainability Caucus, University of Texas:
“Preserving the biodiversity of the natural world by improving atmospheric conditions is of utmost importance to me because I have not yet been able to travel outside of the United States and I would love to be able to experience as much of the beauty of the world as possible when I do get the chance to travel. Continued drilling will only exacerbate the threat to environmental quality and biodiversity and take away from my (and future generations) ability to fully experience the glories of the natural world.”

Davis Gilmore, TX, President, Ping Pong Club, Baylor University:
“I want to protect ocean life for the generations to come.”

Lucy Gehman, VA, Secretary, The Wildlife Society, Virginia Technical Institute:
“As a Wildlife Conservation major, my life’s passion is the preservation and study of life on Earth, but the environmental catastrophes of our recent history have turned my passion into a race against the ticking clock of climate change. Should this bill pass, it would join a long line of ‘profit over planet’ policies which place a healthy bottom line over a healthy future. We have reached the tipping point, it is vital to be phasing out these damaging industries, not facilitating further destruction.”

Juliana Rhee, VT, Member, Generation Conscious Club, University of Vermont:
“As a surfer, I have a vested, arguably selfish interest in keeping the oceans clean and free of pollution and damage that drilling would undoubtedly bring. As a future mother, I sincerely hope to live in a world where my children are able to enjoy the ocean in the same ways I have been. This is already somewhat impossible in light of coral bleaching, ocean acidification, and species extinction rates, but I can still hope. I don't know what our ocean or our world will look like in 20 years, but I do know that it will look a whole lot worse if we enable deep sea mining. In the interest of humans today, children tomorrow, and the earth forever, please oppose the Energy Permitting Reform Act. Thank you.”

Evan Butler, WA, Campaign Coordinator, Washington PIRG, University of Washington:
“Global warming is the most serious threat that our modern civilization faces. It already kills over 5 million people from air pollution.”