

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 2231 Day 2

Witnesses:

Panel 2

Dr. Donald Boesch

President, University of MD Center for Environmental Science, Former Commissioner, National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling

Mr. Michael LeVine

Pacific Senior Counsel, OCEANA

Mr. Sean Dixon

Coastal Policy Attorney, Clean Ocean Action

Ms. Ryan Alexander

President, Taxpayers for Common Sense

Committee Members Present:

Doc Hastings (R-WA), Full Committee Chairman

Alan Lowenthal (D-CA)

Joe Garcia (D-FL)

Steven Horsford (D-NV)

The House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a follow-up hearing on June 11, 2013 to consider the Offshore Energy and Jobs Act (H.R. 2231). If passed, the act would increase energy exploration and production on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). The second day of the hearing, requested by members of the minority party in response to what they deemed a hastily put together first hearing, featured different witnesses regarding the current state of OCS energy production.

Donald Boesch, President of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and former Commissioner for the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, testified that although some improvements regarding safe offshore drilling have been made, many unaddressed problems still remain. Boesch identified several problems including the fact that the recommendations of the commission, available in their final report, have not been codified in legislation, and funding issues regarding the regulation of the oil and gas industry. Boesch went on to say that “the relatively modest liability cap and financial responsibility requirements provide little incentive for oil companies to improve safety practices.”

Michael LeVine, the Pacific Senior Counsel for Oceana, and Sean Dixon, the Coastal Policy Attorney for Clean Ocean Action, testified that the Offshore Energy and Jobs Act would prioritize oil and gas above other industries that rely on the ocean, and put coastal jobs and economies at risk. LeVine explained that more detailed scientific research is required in order to understand the risks involved in drilling offshore, especially in the case of the Arctic Ocean where changing conditions make it difficult to predict potential problems. LeVine also points out that “leases currently owned in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas were purchased more than five years ago,” and “companies have yet to complete any exploration wells on those leases.”

During questioning, Alan Lowenthal (D-CA) asked if a single Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which the bill currently requires, is sufficient to understand the risks involved in opening the OCS for leasing. LeVine responded that one EIS is insufficient and may not account for changes in geology, ocean chemistry, and other factors.

Joe Garcia (D-FL) questioned the witnesses as to why there are many already-leased areas that remain undrilled. LeVine responded that large tracts of currently leased land remain undrilled in the Arctic Ocean due to challenges such as cold weather, ice sheets, and the lack of a proven method to respond to oil spills.

In addition to the hearings, the House Natural Resources Committee held a full committee markup of the bill on June 12, 2013, in which the committee approved an *en bloc* amendment proposed by Doug Lamborn (R-CO). Lamborn's amendment, which was mostly technical and did not alter the intent of the bill, directed the President to conduct new OCS sales in Virginia, South Carolina, and California. H.R. 2231 was adopted and reported to the House of Representatives for a vote.

Witness testimony, as well as a video archive of the entire hearing, are available from the committee website.