Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 15, 2011

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
US Department of the Interior
1849 C Street Northwest
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Dear Secretary Salazar:

For the past several years, the Commonwealth of Virginia has consistently engaged the United States Department of the Interior to express interest in being included in the Five Year Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program – known to many familiar with this issue as the Five Year Plan. Virginia's desire to be included in the Five Year OCS leasing process conducted by the U.S. Department of the Interior reaches back beyond the time when you became Secretary. We write to convey our disappointment with your recent release of a Five Year Plan that does not include Virginia.

In drafting the most recent attempt at a proposed Five Year Plan, the Department has noticeably paid little, if any, attention to the laws, goals and policies of the Commonwealth of Virginia – as expressed by our Governor, Virginia's General Assembly, and the majority of Virginia's Congressional Delegation in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This runs contrary to the primary law governing the Department's duty to conduct a Five Year Plan – which specifically requires the Department consider the: "…laws, goals, and policies of affected States which have been specifically identified by the Governors of such States as relevant matters for the Secretary's consideration."[1]

To briefly review the history of Virginia's support: the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia has communicated to you his desire for future OCS leasing off the coast of Virginia; the majority of Virginia's Congressional Delegation has communicated to you in both written form and in meetings their support for allowing Virginia to have offshore energy development; the House of Representatives has passed legislation in this session of Congress to move forward on Lease Sale 220; both the House and the Senate have legislation awaiting consideration that requires the Department of the Interior to move forward with Lease Sale 220; Virginia's General Assembly has passed legislation that has been signed into law that is in favor of offshore energy

[1] 43 U.S.C. § 1344(a)(2)(F)

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development in Virginia; and finally, the last Five Year Plan noted that of the public comments received, over 79% of Virginian's who supported some form of offshore access. The laws, goals, and policies of the Commonwealth of Virginia are crystal clear: allow Virginia to move forward with offshore energy development.

Given the broad support listed above, it is astonishing that you have put forward a Five Year Plan that locks up Virginia's coastal waters from future offshore energy development – directly ignoring the resolve of the majority of Virginians on this issue. It has taken Virginia years to be included in a Five Year Plan and was proud to be the first new area on the Atlantic Coast with the potential for offshore energy development. As a result, Lease Sale 220 could have taken place as early as this year if it were not for the Administration cancelling the sale last year.

In 2009, API estimated that roughly 143,000 jobs in Virginia were supported by the oil and natural gas industry – contributing roughly $12 billion to our Gross State Product. There is no doubt that safely developing energy off Virginia's shores using American-made technology to ensure the utmost safety would lead to significant job creation in Virginia and nationwide. Now, because Virginia is not included in the recent released proposed plan, it will be years until Virginia may once again realize the possibility of offshore energy development – and the thousands of jobs that could be created as a result.

We write to you again to ask that you reconsider your decision and include the Commonwealth of Virginia in the Fiscal Year 2012-2017 Five Year Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program. Virginia's resolve in support of offshore energy development is unchanged and it is our hope that the U.S. Department of the Interior will adhere to federal law and respect the laws, goals and policies of the Commonwealth on this matter. We look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Wittman

Eric Cantor