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RICHMOND

WILLIAM J. HOWELL
SPEAKER

TWENTY-EIGHTH DISTRICT

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
RULES (CHAIRMAN)

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Speaker Howell Seeks Federal Approval of Offshore Energy Exploration Lease Plan Benefiting Virginia

- Howell Letter to U.S. Interior Secretary Urges Progress on Delayed Job-Creating Lease Sale --
- Calls \$2 Billion Federal Loan for Offshore Energy Projects in Brazil "Offensive" to Unemployed Virginians --
- Asks Governor Kaine, Other Leaders to Join Him in Supporting Funding for Jobs in Virginia, not Brazil --

RICHMOND, VA – In the latest effort by the House Republican Majority Caucus to position Virginia to be a national leader in energy development, Virginia House of Delegates Speaker William J. Howell (R-Stafford) today released a [letter to U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar](#) following his decision earlier this year to delay by an additional six months consideration of a five-year plan for oil and gas development on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf. In his August 25 letter, Speaker Howell offered his strong support for the previously scheduled lease of Virginia's offshore exploration rights – specifically known as federal Sale 220 – in 2011. The public comment period on the proposed schedule of offshore lease sales concludes at the end of September.

"The removal of previous obstacles in the form of Congressional and Presidential moratoria presents Virginia with an ideal opportunity to advance the exploration of natural gas and oil off our shores," noted Speaker Howell in his letter. "While we, as a Commonwealth, have made strides to encourage the development and production of renewable energy, the reality is fossil fuel-based sources will continue to be the major energy supplier for the near-term. The expedited lease of the 2.9 million acres 50 miles offshore of Virginia would significantly improve Virginia's – and America's – energy security as well as assist in meeting that growing demand. Developing these resources would create thousands of new jobs in our Commonwealth, arriving at the right time to assist in lifting our workers, families and communities out of this economic recession. I urge you to move forward on the lease of Sale 220 in an expedited manner without delay so that Virginians can begin benefiting from the new jobs the development will create as well as the safe, affordable energy it will produce."

Speaker Howell also expressed his frustration at the simultaneous [U.S. funding of overseas energy development](#) that will profit a foreign country when America needs to be addressing its own energy independence. The Speaker is deeply disturbed by the decision of our federal government to commit a reported \$2 billion loan to Brazil's state-owned oil company, Petrobras, to help pay for offshore oil exploration near Rio de Janeiro while future U.S. domestic lease sales – such as Sale 220 benefiting Virginia – are currently in limbo. The U.S. Export-Import Bank has preliminarily signed on to provide at least \$2 billion in financial aid backed by American taxpayer funds for this large foreign company. Meanwhile, the Obama Administration has delayed and is re-examining the proposed Five-Year plan for oil and gas development on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf. Hence, Speaker Howell wrote to Secretary Salazar this week urging federal approval of an American offshore energy exploration plan that will benefit Virginians.

“While I am pleased to see that the Obama Administration has seen fit to reject the obstructionists who continually impede progress in offshore energy exploration – albeit in Brazil, I am dismayed that the Obama Administration failed to move forward expeditiously in exploring energy possibilities domestically in Virginia in favor of foreign sources,” remarked Speaker Howell.

“Why is the Obama Administration using American tax money to guarantee a \$2 billion loan so Brazil’s national oil company can develop off its coast but is delaying – and some fear blocking – needed energy exploration safely off the U.S. coasts?

“Why deprive Virginia and the U.S. and Virginia the same opportunity being supported for Brazil?

“The good-paying jobs that could be created, the local economic growth potential and the corresponding state tax revenue derived from opening up Virginia’s coastal waters for offshore energy development unfortunately have been outsourced to other countries by the Obama Administration’s misguided decision. With Virginians suffering through the worst unemployment levels in a generation, it is not only offensive but a slap in their face to see this Administration use their hard-earned tax dollars in support of job creation and energy security in a foreign country.”

“Since Governor Kaine has repeatedly said his position as Chairman of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and close association with the President would lead to benefits for Virginia, I am sure he and other leaders in both parties will want to join me in calling on President Obama to move funds earmarked in support of Brazil’s offshore exploration to similar projects benefitting Virginians. There is no good reason why our U.S. Federal Government should be sending limited U.S. tax dollars overseas when they could be put to work creating new jobs and helping Virginia and the U.S. achieve much-needed energy security and long-term energy independence.”

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ATTACHED: Speaker Howell Letter to U.S. Secretary Salazar, August 25, 2009