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Begich Pushes Salazar on OCS Development *Announcement from feds on leasing plans expected soon*

With the Department of the Interior expected this week to announce its decisions on 2007 -2012 and 2012-2017 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Programs, U.S. Sen. Mark Begich sent a letter to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar today reminding of the importance of OCS oil and gas exploration and production to Alaska.

“I know you and your staff have worked very hard over the past year to obtain the best science and broad public comment on the two five-year plans. As you consider this information, I strongly urge you to ensure the balance you strike in Alaska continues a strong leasing program in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas,” Begich says. “I encourage you to move forward on this plan in the very near future, creating a positive environment as shippers consider their commitments during the upcoming open seasons for the Alaska natural gas pipeline.”

Begich and Salazar have discussed OCS development off Alaska’s coasts in numerous meetings since Salazar became Interior Secretary. In the letter Begich reminds Salazar Alaska’s Chukchi and Beaufort Seas together hold more than 22 billion barrels of oil and 100 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Lease Sale 193, held in 2008, marked a record \$2.8 billion in bonus lease sale bids.

“Recent decisions by the Mineral Management Service and the Environmental Protection Agency make future development in these areas much more likely, creating thousands of jobs, increasing America’s domestic energy production, and enabling the transition to cleaner sources,” Begich writes.

Additionally, Begich says the successful development of oil and gas reserves is key to the long-term viability of the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline and the future of the Alaska natural gas pipeline. Responsible oil and gas resource development in extreme Arctic conditions is what Alaska knows how to do well.

Begich, last year, introduced a package of legislation reflecting the growing importance of the Arctic including increased emergency response in the area, improved Arctic science and research, and to establish a northern Coast Guard base to ensure Alaska’s coastal communities are prepared for and benefit from OCS development.

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