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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 61

Offered January 8, 2020

Prefiled January 6, 2020

*Opposing the exploration and drilling for oil and gas off the coast of Virginia.*

Patron—Keam

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, on January 4, 2018, the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management released its 2019-2024 Draft Proposed Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program (the Draft Plan), proposing to allow offshore exploration and drilling for oil and gas off the Atlantic coast; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of the Interior also has under consideration permits for seismic testing in the Atlantic; and

WHEREAS, on January 17, 2018, Governor Ralph Northam submitted a joint letter with the Governors of Maryland, Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and North Carolina to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, expressing opposition to the Draft Plan and requesting that the Secretary exclude the areas offshore of these states and off the entire Atlantic coast from the Draft Plan; and

WHEREAS, the 2010 BP *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which resulted in the loss of 11 lives and which leaked more than 200 million gallons of crude oil and contaminated hundreds of miles of coast, demonstrates the unacceptable risks of offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling; and

WHEREAS, offshore exploration or drilling for oil and gas off Virginia's coast poses significant risks to Virginia's coastal economy; to military preparedness; to tourism, commercial and sport fishing, and recreation; to marine, estuarine, and coastal ecosystems; and to the overall quality of life and well-being of Virginians; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth's coastal waters provide sanctuary and nesting and breeding grounds for a variety of wildlife, including for vulnerable or at-risk species; and

WHEREAS, federal, state, and local governments have devoted considerable resources toward restoring and protecting the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, wildlife, and iconic species; and

WHEREAS, offshore oil and gas activities could set back progress achieved in restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and irrevocably harm marine, estuarine, and coastal resources and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, tourism, commercial and recreational fishing, and aquaculture industries are vital to Virginia's coastal economy; and

WHEREAS, tourism in Virginia's coastal region in 2017 generated \$5.2 billion in revenue and \$419.9 million in state and local taxes and supported more than 48,000 jobs and nearly \$1.1 billion in salaries; and

WHEREAS, offshore exploration and drilling could harm Virginia's thriving coastal tourism economy; and

WHEREAS, Virginia is the largest seafood producer on the Atlantic coast, and in 2016 watermen landed more than 363 million pounds of seafood with sales of more than \$1.4 billion; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. military services require unimpeded access to the Virginia Capes Operating Area in order to conduct vital air, surface, and subsurface training and operations; and

WHEREAS, the Hampton Roads naval bases constitute the largest naval facility in the world and account for 40 percent of the region's economy; and

WHEREAS, offshore drilling and exploration-related activities could jeopardize the military's ability to conduct training and operations off the coast of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, more than 25 communities in Virginia, including the Cities of Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach and Accomack, Isle of Wight, James City, and Northampton Counties and the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission have passed resolutions opposing offshore drilling or seismic exploration; and

WHEREAS, tourism associations and businesses that depend on clean beaches have opposed offshore exploration and drilling and seismic testing; and

WHEREAS, the speculative benefit of oil and gas exploration and drilling is not worth the risk of an oil spill that could damage the region's environment and economy for decades; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly oppose the exploration and drilling for oil and gas off the coast of Virginia; and, be it

INTRODUCED

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**59** RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit copies of this resolution  
**60** to the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, the President of the United States Senate,  
**61** and the members of the Virginia Congressional Delegation so that they may be apprised of the sense of  
**62** the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter during their deliberations.