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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 56

Offered January 8, 2020

Prefiled January 8, 2020

Recognizing opposition to exploration and drilling for oil and gas off the coast of Virginia.

Patrons—Lewis and Boysko

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 ("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 the Secretary to 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 over 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, 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 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, the seismic testing used for the exploration of potential drilling sites could have adverse effects on marine wildlife; and

WHEREAS, offshore oil and gas activities could set back progress achieved in Chesapeake Bay restoration 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, in 2017, tourism in Virginia's coastal region generated \$5.2 billion in revenue and \$419.9 million in state and local taxes, and supported over 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 over 363 million pounds of seafood, with sales accounting for \$1.4 billion; and

WHEREAS, the United States Armed Forces require unimpeded access to the Virginia Capes Operating Area in order to conduct vital air, surface, and subsurface training and operations; and

WHEREAS, the United States Navy bases in Hampton Roads constitute the largest naval facility in the world and represent 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, 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; and

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

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly recognize

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59 opposition to exploration and drilling for oil and gas off the coast of Virginia; and, be it
60 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to the U.S.
61 Department of the Interior in order that the members of the department may be apprised of the sense of
62 the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter during their deliberations.