

Biden announces more offshore drilling, angering environmentalists

September 29 2023, by Issam AHMED



In this aerial image from a drone, tug boats tow the semi-submersible drilling platform Noble Danny Adkins through the Port Aransas Channel into the Gulf of Mexico.

President Joe Biden's administration on Friday announced it would auction three new oil and gas leases in the Gulf of Mexico, triggering a

furious reaction from environmental groups who said the move would accelerate climate change.

Biden, who faces re-election next year, has repeatedly broken his promise made as a candidate to end new drilling on federal land and water, and the issue could be a drag on his ability to energize Democratic voters, especially youth, in 2024.

Biden did order a pause on new drilling soon after taking office, but analysts say he has been restricted in what he can accomplish because of hostile court decisions and the delicate balance of power in Congress.

And Friday's move was also denounced by advocates of the fossil fuel industry because it represented a significant reduction on the number of lease sales planned under former Republican president Donald Trump—47 off all US coastal areas in the 2024-2029 period.

It "includes a maximum of three potential oil and gas lease sales—the fewest oil and gas lease sales in history—in the Gulf of Mexico Program Area scheduled in 2025, 2027 and 2029," said a statement from the Interior Department.

The statement added that the government is constrained by the terms of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)—Biden's signature climate-investment law passed last year —- which makes the development of new offshore wind farms contingent on also offering at least 60 million acres of oil and [gas leases](#) in the previous year.

This rider was added by Democratic Senator Joe Manchin, an ardent backer of fossil fuels, as a condition of his support, which was in turn crucial to pass the bill.

"The Biden-Harris administration is committed to building a clean

energy future that ensures America's energy independence," said Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland.

"The proposed final program, which represents the smallest number of oil and gas lease sales in history, sets a course for the department to support the growing offshore wind industry and protect against the potential for environmental damage and adverse impacts to coastal communities."

Prioritizing polluters over climate

Those reassurances failed to satisfy climate action activists.

"This decision is beyond disappointing, as Americans face the impacts of the growing climate crisis through more frequent and intense fires, droughts, hurricanes, and floods," said Beth Lowell, vice president for the United States of the non-profit Oceana.

"President Biden is unfortunately showing the world that it's okay to continue to prioritize polluters over real climate solutions."

Mattea Mrkusic, energy transition policy lead for the nonprofit Evergreen Action added, "Experts have warned us for years that any new fossil fuel production is incompatible with limiting warming to 1.5 C degrees—and just this week the International Energy Agency reaffirmed that these kinds of fossil fuel projects are not needed to meet our energy needs."

Mrkusic added new drilling wouldn't just accelerate [climate change](#) but also subject frontline communities to deadly pollution.

The American Petroleum Institute on the other hand slammed the auctions for being too "restrictive."

"At a time when inflation runs rampant across the country, the Biden administration is choosing failed energy policies that are adding to the pain Americans are feeling at the pump," said API President and CEO Mike Sommers.

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