



Biden Oil and Gas Lease Sale Cancellations Draw Strong Reaction

Description

As gas prices continue to break records, the Biden administration's [cancellation](#) of two lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico and one lease sale in [Alaska](#)'s Cook Inlet has drawn clashing responses, including an accusation that the administration is "blatantly lying."

One political figure who weighed in was Donald Trump Jr., who recently campaigned with successful Republican Senate primary candidate J.D. Vance in Ohio.

"Looks like Joe is doing a great job of making inflation his top priority," he wrote in a [tweet](#).

The Cook Inlet oil and gas lease would have covered 1.09 million acres in the Cook Inlet, a body of water connecting Anchorage with the Gulf of Alaska.

A spokesperson for the Department of the Interior told The Epoch Times the Cook Inlet sale was canceled due to a "lack of industry interest in the area."

"I'm not sure that's completely accurate," Kara Moriarty, president and CEO of the Alaska [Oil](#) and Gas Association (AOGA), told The Epoch Times.

"A lot of times, companies don't want to tip their hand about participating in lease sales. The only time you really know if there's interest or not is when you have the lease sale."

"As the former Natural Resources Commissioner for Alaska, I know there is no way they could have confirmed 'no interest' until they held the lease sale," said Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), who said the Biden administration was "blatantly lying to the American people."

Both he and Moriarty referenced correspondence on the Cook Inlet sale from AOGA, which represents more than a dozen oil and gas producers in Alaska, as evidence of industry interest.

"The nature by which this announcement came to news—from the White House's ultra-left climate czar Gina McCarthy, just down the hall from the president, [and] not the Department of Interior—raises further questions over who is crafting these disastrous energy policies," Sullivan said, referencing the accidental email to a CBS reporter from a Biden administration official that first revealed the Cook Inlet

lease's cancellation.

Moriarty told The Epoch Times that "baffling is the nicest word I can come up with" for the cancellation.

Some local environmentalists, by contrast, expressed strong support for the decision.

"I'm very excited that we aren't going to see an oil and gas lease sale that would really hurt our local economy," Liz Mering told The Epoch Times.

Mering is advocacy director and inletkeeper of Cook InletKeeper, an Alaskan group opposed to oil and gas leasing in the region. Its website states that it seeks to "accelerate the transition from fossil fuels to an equitable, renewable energy future."

The Interior spokesperson told The Epoch Times that the two Gulf of Mexico leases were canceled because of "delays due to factors including conflicting court rulings that impacted work on these proposed lease sales."

In June 2021, Louisiana federal Judge James Cain, a Trump appointee, struck down the Biden administration's pause on oil and gas leases. That pause had commenced with [Executive Order 14008](#).

Yet in January, District of Columbia federal Judge Rudolph Contreras, an Obama appointee, ruled that the November 2021 federal offshore oil and gas sale, the largest in history, was invalid. He argued it violated the National Environmental Policy Act because it didn't take greenhouse gas emissions into account. The Biden administration didn't appeal the ruling.

The administration announced its plans to resume lease sales in March after an appeals court [ruled](#) it could incorporate a raised "social cost of carbon" factor when assessing permits.

When he was a presidential candidate, Biden's promises included "banning new oil and gas permitting on public lands and waters."

The latest lease cancellations come as inflation and high gas prices wrack the nation.

AAA [reported](#) that regular gas on May 12 averaged \$4.418 a gallon, the highest average price it has ever recorded.

Diesel is also at the highest price point ever recorded by AAA, averaging \$5.557 a gallon.

"Prices for gasoline, diesel, and other products are high and climbing. Further, those high prices are raising the cost of other goods and services, and here we are with extraordinarily high rates of inflation at both the consumer and producer levels. The actions of this administration suggest little relief anytime soon," energy economist Karr Ingham told The Epoch Times.

He said Biden hasn't yet provided the next legally mandated five-year offshore leasing plan. The current plan ends in June.

“At this late hour, were they to set this new plan in motion today, it would be a year or so before it is in place. That means a significant gap in the time period during which companies may be able to reasonably make plans and allocate capital to drill new projects in these areas. So, in many respects, these canceled leases were the ‘last hurrah’ before that plan expires.”

Lawmakers in Impacted States React

Senators and representatives from Louisiana and Alaska, two states affected by the cancellations, have voiced anger and disgust.

“Pres. Biden has killed more energy lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico. He’s killing jobs, has killed America’s energy independence, and is fueling inflation that is killing Louisiana families. And he’s doing it on purpose,” Sen. John Kennedy (R-La.) wrote in a May 12 [tweet](#).

Kennedy’s senior colleague, Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.), voiced his concerns in similar language.

“President Biden’s administration is actively making high gas prices worse,” Cassidy said. “When we need to unleash American energy production, the Biden administration kills opportunities at every turn.”

“Rather than using American energy sources to help solve the problem and lower prices, the Biden administration continues to carry out policies that only benefit Russia, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and other apparent allies of this White House. It is past time for the administration to put Americans first,” said Rep. Garret Graves (R-La.), who serves on the House Natural Resources committee.

Sullivan said: “The timing and nature of this decision display a disturbing disregard for the pain American families continue to feel at the pump, for the hard-working Americans whose livelihoods and communities depend on the American energy industry, and for the grave consequences, these policies have on America’s energy and national security. As Gina McCarthy celebrates this decision from the White House, rest assured Vladimir Putin is popping corks in the Kremlin.”

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) hasn’t yet commented on the decision.

The Epoch Times has also reached out to the only Democrat representing Louisiana, Rep. Troy Carter (D-La.).

Different Views From Environmental Activists and Industry

Some environmentalists in and around the Cook Inlet celebrated the cancellation.

“There’s a lot of tourism industry that would be really harmed by this lease sale,” Mering said.

She said locals have fought oil and gas activity in the area since the 1970s when Cook Inlet’s Kachemak Bay was protected from drilling enabled by state leases. Commercial fishermen helped lead that pushback.

“There has to be more and more pushback as climate change hits Alaska.”

Moriarty noted that the Cook Inlet has been producing oil and gas for six decades. It generated 293,000 barrels of oil in March. All the oil produced in Cook Inlet is refined at the nearby Nikiski refinery.

“There’s no evidence that production from Cook Inlet has hampered our ability to coexist with commercial and sport fishing interests,” Moriarty said, arguing that oil and gas had helped diversify the Kenai Peninsula’s economy beyond the norm in Alaska.

Referencing the fight over oil in the 1970s, she said that “trying to pick out one incident negates the longstanding tradition we have of coexisting in Cook Inlet.”

Yet environmental activists present a contrasting narrative.

“This news means that the waters of lower Cook Inlet, which nourish the Gulf of Alaska as well as a watershed the size of Virginia, will continue the essential ecological function they’ve served since the last ice age. The people of this region who fought this lease sale will also continue their role in the ecology of placemaking, honoring our collective dependence on clean water,” said environmental activist Marissa Wilson of the Alaska Marine Conservation Council.

Josh Wisniewski, a fisherman in the Lower Cook Inlet, also praised the decision.

“Our fisheries, our quality of life, and regional economy depend on the health of this wild landscape we are privileged to live in. We now have the chance to build on this moment and seek a permanent withdrawal of this region from all future oil and gas lease sales to protect our home waters for future generations.”

In an interview with The Epoch Times, Wisniewski conceded that oil and gas are currently valuable to the larger state but argued that it “doesn’t make sense in this particular context.”

“We’ve got existing oil and gas infrastructure in different places.”

Yet AOGA’s Moriarty argued that Cook Inlet’s production is particularly critical for use within Alaska, including for jet fuel at Ted Stevens International Airport.

“We should be thinking about, ‘How do we get our next barrels of oil from the United States?’” Moriarty said, arguing that greater energy independence was vital to national security.

“The U.S. supplies the cleanest barrels of any major producer on the globe. U.S. greenhouse gas emissions have been declining steadily for more than two decades now and continue to do so,” said energy economist Ingham.

“Constricting U.S. production in no way means those barrels will not be consumed—it just means those barrels will come from somewhere else, and that somewhere else will not produce that oil nearly as cleanly as the United States.”

He speculated about the motives of Earthjustice, which praised the cancellations as “good for the climate” in [CBS coverage](#).

“Is Earthjustice in favor of acquiring America’s energy needs from countries and regions who produce dirtier barrels than the United States? Or are they simply anti-U.S. oil and gas, and ultimately, anti U.S.-consumer?”

The Epoch Times has also reached out to the Environmental Defense Fund, often seen as a left-wing environmental group, and to the Property and Environmental Research Center, a free-market environmental group.

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