



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

September 23, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Leader:

A series of government reports have outlined improper, illegal, and possibly criminal behavior at the Minerals Management Service (MMS), and specifically its Royalty-in-Kind program.

One of the most recent reports, released on September 10, 2008, uncovered inappropriate relationships between department employees and oil industry representatives. It raises many questions about the extent of the influence the oil and gas industry holds over our government.

We filed a bill today, the Minerals Management Improvement Act, which would toughen ethics rules for MMS employees, including a ban on outside employment. The bill would also suspend the scandal-plagued Royalty-in-Kind program until the Interior Department certifies its employees have completed ethics training and a full review of the royalty program has been completed. In addition, our bill would direct MMS to perform all audits it's required to conduct of both on and offshore leases.

As the debate over opening our coastal areas to more drilling draws closer, we urge you to bring up our bill as part of any energy measure that the Senate considers. We must have complete confidence in the agency that oversees the oil industry's access to such lands. And we must have complete trust in that agency, because it handles billions of dollars of taxpayer resources.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Bill Nelson in blue ink.

Senator Bill Nelson

Handwritten signature of Robert Menendez in blue ink.

Senator Robert Menendez