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Statement of Congresswoman Lois Capps April 7, 2010

Forty years ago many of us watched with horror as Santa Barbara's environment and economy were devastated by a terrible oil spill at Platform A. Since then, Santa Barbara has fought relentlessly to end drilling along our magnificent coastline.

I've done my part in Congress to protect our coast. I passed legislation to maintain the now-lapsed federal ban on new offshore leasing. My amendment to encourage negotiations between the Administration, State and oil companies to terminate the 36 leases off our coast was approved by House of Representatives. And I have introduced legislation each Congress, with Senators Feinstein and Boxer, to permanently prevent new leasing in the federal waters off California.

These actions have all been met with public acclaim and as necessary steps to preserve our local environment and economy.

Most recently, the coalition supporting this plan has been leading the fight against former President Bush's offshore drilling program, which included new drilling off California. Last week President Obama wisely rejected this proposal for California. This was a real victory for all of us in Santa Barbara who have been fighting to keep our coastline safe.

But President Obama's decision to prevent new drilling in federal waters is only part of the solution. The second part of the solution is reaching an agreement on how and when we will put an end to existing drilling.

That's what this plan does. And that's why I strongly support it.

First, this plan definitively shuts down four drilling platforms and their support facilities in Santa Barbara County. It assures that Platforms Harvest, Hermosa, Hidalgo, and Irene—and the related infrastructure—are not available for future oil and gas leasing.

Left alone, these platforms pose the biggest threat for new drilling in the federal waters off our coast because under current law they can be here forever. We already hear calls for endless drilling—calls that only get louder every time gas prices rise despite the fact that drilling off Santa Barbara would have no effect on gas prices.

Second, under this plan hundreds of onshore oil wells will also be shut down for good. And the lands containing these wells will be conveyed to the public for protection, research, education and recreation.

Without these commitments, drilling—including from the Tranquillon Ridge field—will continue for decades from these aging platforms and pipes; leaving us with the risk of oil spills, air and water pollution, and harm to our marine wildlife.

Finally, this plan guarantees all drilling activities are carbon neutral and PXP will donate funding for carbon pollution reductions in Santa Barbara County.

Make no mistake: If the people of Santa Barbara County want to prevent new drilling from occurring off their coast and to end production that currently exists—this is the plan to support.

It's transparent. The new plan is being made public immediately.

It's accountable. The plan is consistent with the California Coastal Sanctuary Act.

It's smart. It's past time to come to an agreement on how and when we will shut down existing drilling.

Finally, this plan is enforceable. The State of California and the Attorney General will be able to enforce all terms of the agreement, including the end dates for the platforms. The federal government cannot interfere with the end dates. And, according to existing federal rules and regulations, the federal government cannot force PXP to continue producing oil from its platforms.

Now, some in our community have said this plan—no matter how strong it is—sends the wrong signal to Washington that we're not serious about ending drilling in Santa Barbara. As their federal representative, I can assure you that nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, this plan sends only one message—and it sends it loud and clear: we are willing to go the extra mile to end the drilling along our coast.

None of this would be possible without the leadership from our community's most prominent and longstanding advocates of coastal protection. I appreciate the efforts of the EDC, CPA of Santa Barbara, and GOO!—groups that have worked for years to bring oil drilling in Santa Barbara to an end. I also commend our County Supervisors and other local elected officials, and our local environmental leaders for their support for this plan.

This is not a decision that we've made lightly. It's one we looked at closely. But the bottom line is this: this plan puts an end to existing oil drilling off our coast and it will prevent any future drilling.

Our partnership demonstrates that by working together we can find effective compromises that protect our community's shared interests.

I look forward to working with all of the parties, including the State Lands Commission, and if approved the Coastal Commission and Minerals Management Service, to have this plan approved and implemented soon.

Again, thank you for letting me offer my strong endorsement for this new plan.