



## ***Plug Offshore Wells Act of 2026***

**Introduced in the Senate by:** Senator Peter Welch (D-Vt.); Ron Wyden (D-Ore.); Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.); Ed Markey (D-Mass.)

**Introduced in the House by:** Representative Maxine Dexter (D-OR-03)

**Background:** Abandoned offshore oil and gas infrastructure poses a growing risk to marine ecosystems and the environment as extreme weather events intensify. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), over 2,700 wells and 500 platforms in the Gulf of Mexico are overdue for decommissioning. GAO also found that the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management—which are responsible for enforcing decommissioning deadlines—are unable to effectively enforce decommissioning obligations and financial assurance requirements.

Current delays and defaults in decommissioning offshore oil and gas infrastructure also pose significant financial risks. When oil companies fail to meet their commitments, American taxpayers bear the financial burden of decommissioning abandoned platforms and wells, which is a lengthy and expensive process. As of June 2023, BOEM holds only \$3.5 million in supplemental bonds to cover \$40-\$70 billion in estimated decommissioning costs, creating a large gap of potential taxpayer funding needed to cover any defaults on decommissioning commitments. As the U.S. moves towards clean energy and as more offshore infrastructure goes offline, this figure may increase.

**Legislation:** The *Plug Offshore Wells Act of 2026* aims to address the growing threat of abandoned offshore oil and gas infrastructure to marine ecosystems and the environment as a result of climate change and extreme weather events by directing the Department of the Interior (DOI) to submit an annual report to Congress on the status of decommissioning offshore oil and gas wells, platforms, and pipelines.

The legislation follows GAO's recommended steps on how Congress can address the current backlog of overdue decommissioning requirements, including instituting new reporting requirements from DOI to Congress on the status of decommissioning. The report established in the legislation must be publicly available and include:

- The number of applications for decommissioning;
- The number of offshore wells, platforms, and pipelines not decommissioned by the date required;
- The number of offshore oil and gas wells and platforms approved for decommissioning;
- The length of any oil and gas pipelines that were decommissioned in place or removed;
- The status of enforcement actions by BSEE with respect to decommissioning offshore oil and gas infrastructure.

**Supporting Organizations:** The *Plug Offshore Wells Act* is endorsed by the Center for Biological Diversity, Earthjustice, Natural Resources Defense Council, Oceana, Ocean Conservancy, and the Surfrider Foundation.