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BENNETT SAYS OBAMA ADMINISTRATION IS STALLING DOMESTIC ENERGY PRODUCTION

*Administration's decision increases delays on energy production
and prevents economic growth in Utah*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senator Bob Bennett (R-Utah) today expressed his opposition to the administration's plan to expand reviews of the oil and gas leasing program administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), thus causing further delays in the production of domestic resources.

"This announcement is yet another indication that the administration has no intention to honor its promise to produce a balanced energy plan that includes domestic energy production," said Bennett, a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and ranking Republican of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water. "The Department of the Interior continues to look for ways to make domestic energy more expensive to produce by stalling the process for several years. It is disappointing that even the circumstances of the economic downturn have provided no relief to the relentless disruptions in the production of critical American energy resources."

Bennett also highlighted the fact that many of the leases in Utah took several years and the new policy would extend that even further.

"For those of us in Utah that observed the seven year public process BLM undertook to create land use plans, including for oil and gas production, it is stunning that the Obama administration thinks several years is not long enough and that we should increase the level of bureaucratic process and red tape," continued Bennett. "Another layer of unnecessary bureaucratic review will amount to more delays and expenses and

may shift jobs overseas rather than spurring job growth within our country.”

Bennett specifically pointed out his opposition to the administration’s decision to narrow the scope of the use of a provision known as “Section 390 categorical exclusions.” In a recent letter to Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, Bennett objected to the potential removal or limitation of using a Section 390 categorical exclusion in the oil and gas lease program. This particular provision in the 2005 Energy Policy Act streamlines government efficiency and reduces redundancy by allowing the BLM to approve certain oil and gas projects without preparing additional environmental analyses that would normally be required by the National Environmental Policy Act. Currently, the Utah BLM has a backlog of over 1100 applications to permit drilling.

Despite voting for the Energy Policy Act of 2005 while both served in the Senate, Secretary Salazar and President Obama’s new policy will significantly limit the use of Section 390 categorical exclusions.

“I am especially disappointed that those who participated in the development of the carefully crafted provisions of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 are now using their authority to attempt to dismantle what had been a true bipartisan achievement in Congress.”

Attached is a copy of Bennett’s December 23, 2009 letter to Secretary Salazar.

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<http://bennett.senate.gov>