THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
Washington, D.C. 20230

March 12, 2007

The Honorable Richard Cheney
President of the Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the Administration, I respectfully submit for Congressional consideration and action a bill "to provide the necessary authority to the Secretary of Commerce for the establishment and implementation of a regulatory system for offshore aquaculture in the United States Exclusive Economic Zone." I also enclose a detailed section-by-section analysis for the draft bill.

Aquaculture refers to the cultivation of fish, shellfish, plants, and other aquatic organisms for human consumption and other uses. Currently, aquaculture accounts for over 40 percent of retail seafood worldwide. The proposed bill will facilitate expansion of this activity in federal waters beyond the limits of State jurisdiction, where there is significant potential for development of the U.S. aquaculture industry to meet the growing demand for seafood. New technologies have been developed to better withstand extreme conditions of the offshore ocean environment, allowing this expansion to occur. By adopting these technologies, the United States can boost production of valuable marine species while creating jobs that contribute to the economic development of coastal communities. Additional domestic supplies of nutritious seafood will reduce pressure on wild fisheries. Future technological innovation by the offshore aquaculture industry will advance U.S. technology and boost U.S. competitiveness in world markets. In addition, by adopting rigorous environmental standards for aquaculture, the United States can establish its leadership in development of sustainable uses of marine ecosystems, as an example for our trading partners.

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy has acknowledged the growing significance of offshore aquaculture for seafood production and identified the need for a comprehensive offshore aquaculture regulatory framework in the United States. This draft bill responds directly to the Commission's recommendations that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration develop a comprehensive, environmentally sound permitting and regulatory program for offshore aquaculture. In June 2005, I transmitted an earlier version of this draft bill in fulfillment of the Administration's commitment, in the U.S. Ocean Action Plan, to propose national offshore aquaculture legislation in the 109th Congress. The version I am proposing for consideration in the 110th Congress incorporates revisions to the legislation based on input from two Senate hearings on S. 1195, the National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2005, in the 109th Congress.

The overall purpose of the proposal is to provide the necessary authorities to the Secretary of Commerce for the establishment, implementation, and enforcement of a comprehensive regulatory system for offshore aquaculture in the Exclusive Economic Zone. This includes a requirement to set additional environmental requirements to ensure that such development proceeds in an environmentally responsible manner that is consistent with stated policy to protect wild stocks and the quality of marine ecosystems and is compatible with other uses of the marine environment. The intent of the Act is to complement rather than supersede existing resource management authorities. As such, it provides for coordination and consultation with other federal agencies, Fishery Management Councils, and coastal states.

The Administration looks forward to working with the Congress to enact this legislation. The Office of Management and Budget has advised that there is no objection to the transmittal of this draft bill and that its enactment would be in accord with the program of the President. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Nat Wienecke, Assistant Secretary for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, at 482-3663.

Sincerely,

Carlos M. Gutierrez

Enclosures

Identical Letters Sent to:

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Honorable Steny H. Hoyer
Majority Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United State Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John A. Boehner
Republican Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman, Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nick J. Rahall, Jr.
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ted Stevens
Co-Chairman, Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Don Young
Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515