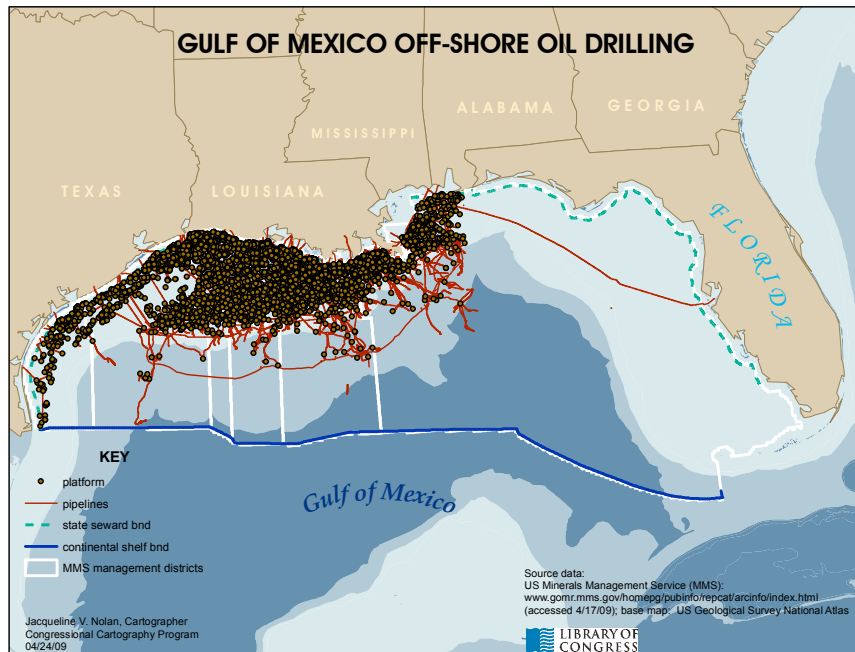


21 FLORIDA

EDITORIALS OPPOSING THE FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE'S OIL DRILLING BILL

... appeared in an eight-day period -- April 21-29



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“... folly ...”

-The Orlando Sentinel

“...near-shore oil drilling must be stopped.”

- Florida Today

“Drilling off Florida's coastlines is still a bad idea.”

- Pensacola News Journal

“...Cannon's justification for the amendment is ludicrous for its predictability and shortsightedness.”

- Daytona Beach News Journal

“Greased bill should be allowed to die a quiet death.”

- Miami Herald

“It is a dangerous pipedream, one that could ruin Florida's economy and coastal waters.”

- The Tampa Tribune

“The industry is preying on Tallahassee's desperation for new revenue that doesn't involve raising taxes. And it's hoping to avoid scrutiny for a plan that does nothing for the state's current fiscal crisis, endangers pristine beaches and does little to solve America's energy problems.”

- The St. Petersburg Times

“... the governor and the state Senate should block this initiative until it can be looked at with the care it needs.”

- Ft. Myers News-Press

“A combination of energy, including solar and biofuels already advanced by and in Florida, is more on point. The integrity of Florida's

beaches and marine life is more important than hurry-up politics. ”

- Naples News

“Why risk permanent damage to Florida's powerful brand?”

- Charlotte Sun

“... HB 1219 would send the state in wrong direction, in the belief that the state and nation can drill their way toward progress.”

- The Sarasota Herald Tribune

“... a preposterous giveaway.”

- South Florida Sun Sentinel

“Floridians shouldn't stand for it.”

- Gainseville Sun

“Cannon's bill made it through a blink-and-you-missed-it review in the House Policy Council, where his presentation utilized charts and handouts funded by a group called Florida Energy Associates, which refuses to name its members.

That kind of secrecy is a cancer on the body politic and another reason why Floridians should be up in arms.”

- The Tallahassee Democrat

[The following editorials appeared after the House voted to approve the bill but Senate leaders said they would not take it up this session...]

“... we're glad that the Senate understood the importance of protecting our shorelines by keeping the offshore drilling ban intact.’

- The Pensacola News Journal

“ Thankfully, the Florida Senate had the wisdom to kill the House's late-session measure...”

- Fort Myers News Press

“... it’s time to rely on renewable energy — and save our shores.

- Bradenton Herald

“Florida should lead in alternative energy ...”

- TCPalm

“ Let the drilling bill sink and approve a good renewable-resources package ...”

- Sarasota Herald Tribune

“Thank goodness that as the measure moves along to the Senate and perhaps Gov. Charlie Crist, its chances of formal approval fade ...”

- Naples Daily News

TCPALM

Editorial: Florida should lead in alternative energy, not take environmental risks off coasts

Wednesday, April 29, 2009

As the nation's energy policy focuses more on renewable resources and less on oil and gas, the Florida House would have the state move in the opposite direction.

On Monday, the Republican-controlled body approved a bill that would allow the governor and Cabinet to authorize drilling leases as close as three miles off the state's beaches.

The legislation, filed late in the legislative session, moved quickly through the House with little review or debate even though it could have major implications for the state's future.

Fortunately, the proposal seems to have far less support in the Senate. Even Senate President Jeff Atwater, R-North Palm Beach, said this week, "I'm not receptive to it. That is a really significantly important issue and one that I think would, frankly at our end, would take some serious review."

If the drilling proposal should get through the Senate, Gov. Charlie Crist should veto it. It represents the worst of narrow interests superseding what is best for the people of the state.

Supporters of the bill claim that opening an area from three to 10 miles off Florida's coasts for oil and gas drilling could bring in more than \$3 billion annually.

While that may seem enticing for a state struggling with revenue shortfalls, the drilling, in the event of a spill from drilling or transport, could cause irreparable harm to the environment and greatly endanger the state's \$65 billion-a-year tourism industry.

That's not the kind of tradeoff reasonable Floridians would embrace.

Still, many Floridians support offshore drilling, apparently under the misconception that oil found would be "our" oil and it would result in lower gas prices and reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

In reality, the oil would belong to multinational oil companies that would sell the oil to the highest bidder in the global market. There would be little benefit to consumers other than royalties potentially paid to the state.

U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., who has successfully helped to block oil and gas drilling in waters controlled by the federal government off Florida shores, had this to say:

"There's no good reason for undoing protections wisely put, and kept, in place by Govs. (Bob) Graham, (Lawton) Chiles and (Jeb) Bush. Those protections spared our state's economy and environment from the ravages of industrializing and degrading our coastline. Those who now propose to allow oil rigs know full well the plan will do nothing to reduce energy prices or reduce our country's reliance on oil. This simply is the agenda of big-oil interests hiding behind shadowy advocacy group and controlling Florida's lawmaking."

Monday's vote in the House was largely along party lines. The issue had previously become partisan during the presidential campaigns with Republicans pushing the mantra of "Drill here, drill now."

With the GOP controlling the state House, Senate and the governor's office, the future of allowing oil drilling remains uncertain. The greater effort, however, should be preparing the state to become more involved in alternative and environmentally safer energy.

Florida will come out of its economic recession long before any oil or gas would flow from any offshore rigs. But, the big rigs and the environmental threat would be permanent.

If that is the legacy our lawmakers want to leave for future generations, they should hide their names and faces in shame.

BRANDENTON HERALD

Senate comes through

The only surprise in the Florida Senate's vote last night to slam the door on drilling between three and 10 miles off Florida's beaches was how swiftly the decision came down.

We can't overstate our relief. What has surprised us for the past week was how the quickly the House was pushing through selling off the state's coastline.

Just hours before the Senate saved the day, the House voted 70-43 — with only two Democrats in support and only three Republicans against — for near-shore oil and gas drilling.

Rep. Bill Galvano, R-Bradenton, was one of those who ended up voting against the move. And Sen. Mike Bennett, R-Bradenton, vowed from the beginning that the bill was going nowhere in the Senate. For a measure that goes nowhere toward energy independence — in fact, it could set us back decades — and likely

could damage our environment and tourism industry, their constituents deserved nothing less.

Rep. Ron Reagan, R-Bradenton, said he voted for the measure to help move the dial on making the country independent from foreign oil. But drilling that close to shore doesn't begin to mitigate our dependence on oil. As Gov. Charlie Crist has urged since 2007, it's time to rely on renewable energy — and save our shores.

SARASOTA HERALD TRIBUNE

Forward and reverse on energy

Senate takes a progressive approach, while House goes backward

April 28, 2009

The Florida Senate and the House of Representatives are taking distinctly different approaches toward energy policy. The Senate's approach is deliberate and progressive. The House's has been careless and regressive.

On Monday, in the last week of the Legislature's annual 60-day session, the House voted 70-43 for a bill that would rapidly and radically repeal a long-standing ban on oil and gas drilling in the state's near-shore waters.

Meanwhile, the House version of a bill -- supported by Gov. Charlie Crist -- that would create targets and incentives for developing and using renewable sources of energy (such as solar power) has languished.

The Senate, on the other hand, has placed its renewable-energy bill (1154) on the special order calendar, which increases the chances that it will be approved before the legislative session ends.

'Serious review'

Senate President Jeff Atwater, a Republican from South Florida, all but refused to consider the House's drilling bill. Atwater diplomatically said the bill, which would reverse well-established precedents protecting Florida's coastline, "is really a significantly important issue" that requires "serious review."

Serious review isn't what the Republican-dominated House gave the bill, which seeks to allow drilling as close as three miles off Florida's West Coast, in an area extending from Pensacola to Naples.

House leaders circumvented committees and authorized amendments that dramatically expanded the scope of the legislation before a vote.

No security in drilling

Some of the most vocal proponents of the bill claimed the drilling would "secure our nation" and its energy supplies and help bring energy independence to Florida.

No, it won't. The entire nation has less than 3 percent of the world's oil reserves but consumes 25 percent of the world's supply. U.S. agencies have repeatedly said that all of the untapped domestic supplies combined do not have the capacity to lower prices or reduce dependency on foreign oil.

To his credit, Rep. Bill Galvano, a Bradenton Republican, showed his independence by voting against the final version of the House bill. Of the other Republican legislators from our coastal region, Ron Reagan, Doug Holder and Ken Roberson followed the party line and Paige Kreegel didn't vote. Keith Fitzgerald and Darryl Rouson joined the majority of Democrats in opposition.

Since Crist said this week that he would not endorse a proposal to bundle the drilling and renewable-energy sources into one big bill, the sensible strategy for the Legislature is to follow the Senate.

Let the drilling bill sink and approve a good renewable-resources package, so Florida can be both deliberate and progressive on energy.

FORT MYERS NEWS PRESS

Editorial: Senate smart on drilling bill

EDITORIAL • APRIL 29, 2009

Thankfully, the Florida Senate had the wisdom to kill the House's late-session measure that would have allowed offshore drilling three miles from the coast. Operations that close to the shoreline would be absurd for a state reliant on beach tourism.

The News-Press Editorial Board has long supported offshore drilling in the Gulf, but only far away from tourists and residents. There's no need to risk mishaps three miles out, which could have a devastating effect on tourism, Florida's No. 1 industry.

State-of-the-art drilling has an excellent safety record, and there's no question that drilling could generate billions in state revenues, create thousands of jobs and help reduce U.S. dependence on foreign fuels.

But there needs to be a significant buffer between beaches and rigs. Certainly the Lee County delegation should realize that an accident could be disastrous to Southwest Florida, yet Rep. Gary Aubuchon, R-Cape Coral, is the only local member (and one of only two Republicans) who voted against HB 1219. "It's because of those islands (Sanibel and Captiva) that I had to vote no," Aubuchon said.

NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Editorial: Offshore drilling ... issue that won't go away needs full public debate

April 29, 2009

Get used to it.

From now on the drumbeat for offshore drilling will match that for casino gambling. Driven by money, the push will go on and on and on until someone gives in.

But that doesn't mean our Southwest Florida legislative delegation is off the hook to look out for our best interests.

As long as there are other, unused oil leases out there and other options for a comprehensive approach to our nation's energy needs, we are unable to justify the risk to our economy — which is inextricably linked to our environment — to justify drilling from three to 10 miles offshore in state territory.

We feel the same way about drilling farther out, in federal territory.

Comments on up-close drilling made by two Southwest Florida legislators to a Daily News reporter catch the eye. Rep. Matt Hudson, R-Naples, is convinced offshore drilling would be safe based on the experience with inland Collier drilling since the 1940s. Rep. Trudi Williams, R-Fort Myers, points to “not one offshore spill” amid Hurricane Katrina.

We would take issue with those reasons being the bedrock of such important policy.

Williams’ “not one spill” comment, which has often been repeated by politicians, is simply not true. A simple check of the Department of the Interior, U.S. Minerals Management Service Web site does indeed note that Katrina did not experience a major oil spill.

But Katrina caused about 70 spills in the Gulf with a volume more than 230,000 gallons, according to a study by Det Norske Veritas, commissioned by the MMS.

The same study said Hurricane Rita in 2005 resulted in fewer spills, 54, but with a greater volume, more than 500,000 gallons.

The study does consider the spills a success story of sorts, considering the size of the storms, the number of rigs and pipelines in the Gulf and the resulting size of the spills, all of which occurred offshore with “no onshore impacts.” The iconic Exxon Valdez spill involved more than 10 million gallons, by comparison.

But more than 700,000 gallons of oil — the total spilled in both storms — is a lot when it lands on your beach. And allowing drilling within three miles certainly brings such threats too close.

The other day all members of our region’s House delegation went along and voted “yes” for the offshore drilling proposal.

Thank goodness that as the measure moves along to the Senate and perhaps Gov. Charlie Crist, its chances of formal approval fade, according to the Associated Press.

The Southwest Florida delegation in the Senate ought to lead that charge.

The best way to get any energy policy done is to let everyone know in advance of a legislative session what's on the agenda and invite all sides to come and debate the pros and cons, for better or for worse, in full public view. Nothing more, nothing less.

PENSACOLA EWS JOURNAL

Banning offshore drilling protects Florida shorelines

EDITORIAL • APRIL 29, 2009

The Florida Senate wisely put an end to the possibility of allowing oil and gas drilling in coastal waters that have been off limits for a quarter-century.

Lifting the offshore drilling moratorium would have posed a serious threat to Florida's environment and economy. It also would have no real impact anytime soon on oil prices or supplies, and would have little, if any, impact in the long run.

Just hours after the House voted 70-43 to approve a bill that would have allowed offshore drilling as close as three miles to Florida's coastlines, the Senate agreed to not even consider the measure at all this year.

The possibility of offshore drilling has become increasingly popular as gas prices continue to burden American drivers. However, given the evidence, the recent bill floated by Republicans is seriously flawed, to say the least. Just as removing a bucket

of water from a lake does little to bring down its level, offshore drilling appears thoroughly unable to have a significant effect on oil prices.

The House bill would have ended an Outer Continental Shelf drilling moratorium that Congress has renewed every year since 1981. It covers 85 percent of the country's coastal waters — everywhere except the central and western Gulf of Mexico and some areas off Alaska.

The risks would be significant, particularly to the environment and tourist economy of Florida — especially in cases of accidents resulting from exploration, drilling or transport.

The reality is that the amount of oil and gas that could be drilled in these offshore locations is minuscule compared with the quantities that are produced worldwide. The combination of these facts suggests that any offshore drilling would do little to ease our dependence on foreign oil, either now or in the long term.

The real solution is not desperate measures to chop a few pennies off the cost of gasoline, it is to create a sense of national urgency in attacking energy use as a priority national security issue with the aim of reducing our dependence on oil, not just foreign oil.

For the sake of Florida's economy and environment, we're glad that the Senate understood the importance of protecting our shorelines by keeping the offshore drilling ban intact.

THE TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Big Oil's ambush

Stop late move for near-shore oil drilling

APRIL 27, 2009

It's Big Oil's sneak attack.

With the clock ticking on the final days of the legislative session, the industry and its supporters are suddenly trying to ram through changes that would allow oil and gas drilling within three miles of Florida's coast.

That would put rigs within sight of the state's most pristine and popular beaches and run the risk of spills that could devastate Florida's tourism industry — worth \$65.5 billion in 2007 — and the rich marine life that inhabits near-shore waters.

The legislation would be a total reversal in state policy that dates back 30 years to when Florida imposed a ban on drilling in state waters, which run 10 miles out. A drilling ban in federal waters that start 10 miles out remains in place, with wells kept 125 miles off the coast in the Gulf of Mexico for environmental reasons.

Big Oil and its backers knew this reckless scheme would never survive had they unveiled it when the Legislature convened nearly two months ago, so they waited until Tuesday to launch their ambush.

It came from Rep. Dean Cannon, the Orlando Republican slated to become Speaker of the House in 2010, who introduced a bill to lift the prohibition, claiming he wanted to start a "mature, thoughtful discussion" about state's energy policy.

If that's the case, why introduce it at the last minute and leaving no time for such a serious matter to be debated?

In truth, Cannon, the Associated Industries of Florida and Big Oil have been quietly planning this move, using the state's fiscal crisis to suddenly contend the drilling would be a panacea that would supposedly generate \$31 billion in state royalties over the next 20 years.

But those are industry numbers that have not been independently scrutinized. Furthermore, the figure pales in comparison to the annual economic impact of tourism, which would be ruined if a spill occurred and kept away beach-loving tourists who totaled 82.5 million in 2008.

Big Oil's claim that new technology makes near-shore drilling safe is not true: Federal and Coast Guard studies show rigs, pipelines, a tanker accident and on-shore oil

facilities all damaged by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita in 2005 spilled 9 million gallons of oil. By comparison, 1989's infamous Exxon-Valdez spill in Alaska was 11 million barrels.

Federal studies also show oil and gas drilling dump huge amounts of pollutants into the water, with a single well generating between 1,500 tons and 2,000 tons of waste material. The drilling mud alone contains a witches' brew of toxic metals and chemicals, including lead, mercury, benzene, arsenic and other known carcinogens. Facilities on shore that support the drilling also produce pollution.

What makes this travesty worse is the drilling would increase U.S. dependence on oil when our nation should be moving toward an economy based on alternative energy sources, including solar power and hybrid and electric cars.

However, the Republican-controlled Legislature is holding back two important measures advocated by Gov. Crist that would make Florida a leader in green energy and create new industries and jobs:

One would set higher auto emission standards, reducing our state's reliance on foreign oil and drastically cutting Florida's greenhouse gas emissions that are contributing to global warming. The standards would regulate tail-pipe emissions in Florida starting with new models in 2013, save Florida motorists 440 million gallons of gas a year by 2016 and help spur green car manufacturing.

The other would mandate that Florida utilities produce 20 percent of their power by 2020 using renewable sources such as solar and bio-mass fuels, another job creator.

Cannon's bill made it through a blink-and-you-missed-it review in the House Policy Council, where his presentation utilized charts and handouts funded by a group called Florida Energy Associates, which refuses to name its members.

That kind of secrecy is a cancer on the body politic and another reason why Floridians should be up in arms.

The drilling bill still faces the Senate and Gov. Crist, and they should kill it. This is Tallahassee politics at its worst and nothing more than an attempt to sell out Florida's environment and risk its number one industry — tourism — to further fatten Big Oil's profits.

And for Cannon and other supporters to reap campaign contributions from the oil industry in return.

This editorial opinion was published Sunday in *Florida TODAY*.

FLORIDA TODAY

April 26, 2009

Our views: Big Oil's ambush

Legislature's late move for near-shore oil drilling must be stopped

It's Big Oil's sneak attack.

With the clock ticking on the final days of the legislative session, the industry and its supporters are suddenly trying to ram through changes that would allow oil and gas drilling within 3 miles of Florida's coast.

That would put rigs within sight of the state's most pristine and popular beaches and run the risk of spills that could devastate Florida's tourism industry — worth \$65.5 billion in 2007 — and the rich marine life that inhabits near-shore waters.

While the Gulf Coast will be in the crosshairs our Space Coast beaches would not be immune from potential danger, with possible spills from wells that could be drilled along Florida's southern tip carried by currents here.

The legislation would be a reversal in state policy that dates back 30 years to when Florida imposed a ban on drilling in state waters, which run 10 miles out. A drilling ban in federal waters that start 10 miles out remains in place, with wells kept 125 miles off the coast in the Gulf of Mexico for environmental reasons.

A reckless scheme

Big Oil and its backers knew this reckless scheme would never survive had they unveiled it when the Legislature convened nearly two months ago, so they waited until Tuesday to launch their ambush.

It came from Rep. Dean Cannon, the Orlando Republican slated to become Speaker of the House in 2010, who introduced a bill to lift the prohibition, claiming he wanted to start a "mature, thoughtful discussion" about the state's energy policy.

If that's the case, why introduce it at the last minute and leave no time for such a serious matter to be debated?

In truth, Cannon, the Associated Industries of Florida and Big Oil have been quietly planning this move, using the state's fiscal crisis to suddenly contend the drilling would be a panacea that would supposedly generate \$31 billion in state royalties over the next 20 years.

But those are industry numbers that have not been independently scrutinized. Furthermore, the figure pales in comparison to the annual economic impact of tourism, which would be ruined if a spill occurred and kept away beach-loving tourists who totaled 82.5 million in 2008.

Safe drilling myth

Big Oil's claim that new technology makes near-shore drilling safe is not true:

- Federal and Coast Guard studies show rigs, pipelines, a tanker accident and on-shore oil facilities, all damaged by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita in 2005. spilled 9 million gallons of oil. By comparison.

THE PENSACOLA NEWS JOURNAL

Offshore drilling still not welcome in Florida

April 23, 2009

The debate over lifting Florida's offshore drilling ban is back, but the decision should be the same: Drilling off Florida's coastlines is still a bad idea. Conscientious state leaders have long opposed offshore drilling not just for environmental motivations but for economic reasons. They recognize what clean beaches mean to the state's economy.

Any coastline threatened by offshore drilling could devastate an economy that relies heavily on tourism. But, of course, the fear that those economies are threatened is based on the environmental concerns about the drilling. So even those who worry about the economic impact are admitting that it's about the potential environmental impact.

That's why we are disheartened by an amendment that passed the House Policy Council on Tuesday that would allow drilling leases as close as 3 miles from shore.

If passed, the bill would replace Florida's ban on drilling with a new proposal that allows the Cabinet and the governor to accept proposals for oil and gas exploration.

Given the objections to offshore drilling, it was not surprising that the public didn't get a chance to debate the amendment until late Monday night. In contrast, Council members had a chance to hear well-prepared research reports from oil and gas officials as well as results from an industry-supported poll highlighting waning opposition to offshore drilling.

It's true that support of Florida's ban on offshore drilling has slipped in recent years as the cost of gas rose during a period last year to \$4 per gallon. In 2006, President George W. Bush signed a law opening up drilling in the western Gulf but, because of environmental concerns for Florida's coastline, the law prohibited drilling within 100 to 125 miles off the state's coast.

Even as the demand for energy increased, the goal in anti-drilling efforts has been to keep rigs in the Gulf of Mexico at least 100 miles off the coast of Florida, from the Panhandle to the Keys.

There is no reason to reverse the state's long-held opposition to offshore drilling.

Gov. Crist should take a stand and veto any measure that threatens Florida's coastlines.

The Orlando Sentinel

What we think: Drilling threatens coast

April 24, 2009

Rep. Dean Cannon's plan to open Florida's coast to oil and gas drilling deserves all the ridicule it's getting, given its sheer preposterousness.

But it's folly to deride the plan without also appreciating the possibility of it actually passing Florida's Legislature.

A lot of folks in Tallahassee actually like it. Important, powerful folks.

Folks like Senate budget chief J.D. Alexander, who said he backs the idea of opening the Gulf to energy exploration.

And Gov. Charlie Crist. Mr. Crist said he's entertaining the plan because he's "open minded" and "intrigued" by the potential to extract oil "in a way that is safe, in a way that is clean and in a way that generates a lot of revenue for the state of Florida."

Cha-ching! The governor's last point — generating revenue — is what's driving him.

The state's facing a \$6 billion budget deficit and shortfalls in ensuing years if it doesn't make deep cuts in services and tap new revenue sources. Mr. Cannon's plan — ridding the state of its drilling ban by giving the energy industry the ability to set up rigs in a zone between 3 and 10 miles offshore — would give the state some of that revenue.

Any company wanting to apply for the chance to troll the waters would have to pay the state a \$1 million non-refundable application fee. And according to the oil industry that's in lock-step with Mr. Cannon on his bill, the state also could collect \$1.6 billion in royalties and taxes if the wells produce oil.

But here's where things get ridiculous. Mr. Cannon says that even though the state would be soliciting applications to drill, the governor and Cabinet in their review of them would be under "no obligation whatsoever" to approve them.

Right. The oil industry will, year after year, happily pay a million dollars for one application after another without the expectation that the state will approve many of them.

And if the idea's to make it difficult to obtain a drilling permit, why give the governor and Cabinet every opportunity to approve them? Oil companies could skirt common standards set up for other applicants in Florida, who have to show how their plans won't damage the environment. Rather, the governor and Cabinet would just have to find the drilling applications "not contrary to the public welfare."

More nonsense from Mr. Cannon comes wrapped in promises that money raised from drilling could fund Florida Forever. It's nonsense to think that unpredictable oil-lease payments would work to finance the state's land-buying program.

If the Legislature and Mr. Crist approve Mr. Cannon's giveaway to the oil industry, things could get really dangerous. The industry contends its drilling doesn't produce oil spills. But the Minerals Management Service, the federal agency regulating offshore drilling, reported 124 oil spills caused by hurricanes in 2005.

No wonder that Congress has imposed a drilling ban in the Gulf of Mexico covering federal waters 10 to 125 miles off Florida's coast.

Yet the greater threat to the environment than drilling comes from the infrastructure supporting the rigs: the tankers, land-based storage facilities and pipelines. They'd infringe on the coast's fragile estuaries, bays, river grass beds and wildlife.

Mr. Cannon's gift to energy companies also could help sink a measure that actually could benefit the environment. The commuter-rail project for Central Florida, which Mr. Cannon calls his No. 1 priority, requires his muscle to pass the Legislature.

He needs to devote his time and energy to saving commuter rail, not serving Big Oil.

Charlotte Sun

04/25/09

Slippery oil drilling idea is bad policy

OUR POSITION: Why risk permanent damage to Florida's powerful brand: sunshine and beaches?

Florida's calling card is sunshine and beaches. Trading that for sketchy promises of oil and gas royalties and cheaper gas is a bad deal.

So red flags flew when a House committee approved, and oil industry lobbyists applauded, a suddenly introduced bill to allow the governor and Cabinet to approve oil drilling in state waters within 10 miles of Florida's coast.

The usual public scrutiny that bills, even specialty license plate bills, receive was completely absent. Even the Cabinet members who would be given the responsibility for drilling approvals seemed caught by surprise. A spokesman for Attorney General Bill McCollum said he was "open-minded" to the proposal, but later amended his reaction to "skeptical."

The incredibly flexible Gov. Charlie Crist, who campaigned against drilling in federal waters when he ran for governor, performed another policy twist in announcing his own open-

mindedness. The House proposal, which was so stealthy that it has no Senate companion, would allow drilling even closer to Florida's beaches than the 10-mile federal boundary.

The House committee took a page from the playbook of former President George W. Bush, who signed an order lifting a 27-year-old ban on coastal drilling five days before leaving office. That measure galvanized drilling opponents who noted the irony of the fact that it came within days of the 40th anniversary of the nation's most disastrous drilling-related oil spill.

The 1969 Santa Barbara spill covered 800 square miles of ocean waters and 150 miles of shoreline with 3.2 million gallons of oil. Corpses of dolphins, seals, fish and birds washed up on the state's beaches and triggered a wave of stricter regulation of oil drilling. Nonetheless, more than 50 spills, some up to 20,000 gallons, have occurred off California since, according to the California Legislature's Coastal Caucus.

We understand the change in popular sentiment that makes it more politically palatable to consider allowing drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico. The potential revenue oil royalties would generate are a tempting lure during a fiscal crisis.

But oil and gas companies have thousands of active leases on millions of acres of federal land (including seabeds) that they are not exploiting, or even exploring. Oil companies have deactivated more than half of their exploratory rigs in the country since last year in response to lower prices and falling demand for gas and oil, according to Baker Hughes, Inc., a

Houston-based oil and gas industry analyst.

Drilling proponents are exploiting a misconception that drilling in coastal waters will lower the cost of gasoline for American motorists. Studies by government agencies, industry trade groups and environmental organizations all concur the potential savings is pennies per gallon. But since oil is sold on the global market, not steered toward the producing country, those savings aren't a certainty.

When a proposal pops up toward the end of a legislative session, your eyes aren't the sense you need to know if it's a good idea. The smell gives it away. Sneaky political tactics that risk our most valuable asset just plain stink.

THE DAYTONA BEACH NEWS JOURNAL

Rigs on the Horizon

Big Oil's Back with another attack on state's drilling ban

April 23, 2009

Give oil and gas company lobbyists this: They are persistent. And so are the legislators who shill for them year after year with attempts to lift Florida's ban on drilling in state waters. But give them nothing more, certainly not the amendment passed by the Republican-dominated House Policy Council, 17-6, Tuesday to permit oil and gas exploration 3.5 miles from the state's east coast and 11 miles from its Gulf coast.

This year Dean Cannon, R-Orlando, in line to become the next state House speaker, is leading a stealth attack. He sprung the amendment Tuesday, replacing language in a bill up for its last vote before reaching the House floor. The shenanigans aside, Cannon's justification for the amendment is ludicrous for its predictability and shortsightedness.

He's using the weak economy as excuse, suggesting that Florida needs the proposed \$1 million fee from each oil or gas company exploration permit approved by the governor to help alleviate budget constraints. Never mind what havoc might occur to the state's economy and budget from eventual oil operations along both coasts of this tourist-dependent state.

Drill, baby, drill remains a mantra of the state's Republican leaders. And don't forget Gov. Crist's flip-flop last year in support of off-coast drilling in hopes of winning John McCain's nod as his vice presidential candidate. Who knows where the governor will be on this proposal. The state Cabinet, with Crist on board, bought back \$12.5 million in drilling leases just before Jeb Bush left office to protect the peninsula's Gulf coastline and end a long legal battle. The state would now have to issue more than a dozen permits just to recoup that money. So much for Cannon's economic-benefit argument.

Audubon Policy Director Eric Draper put it this way in a news release Tuesday, "Audubon rigorously opposes this destructive proposal because it would impact Florida coastal ecosystems and our pristine beaches, put marine and coastal wildlife at risk, and delay the serious measures needed to reduce global warming and its impacts on the state and our quality of life." He called on the Legislature to abandon the dirty attack on the drilling plan and instead pass fuel efficiency requirements for cars and trucks sold in the state that would reduce greenhouse gases.

Now there's an idea that deserves legislators' support, Cannon-like stealth or otherwise. But you won't see the headlights of clean cars on Florida's roads as long as Cannon and company are envisioning lighted oil rigs on coastal horizons. Shill, baby, shill.

THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

EDITORIAL: Oil drilling no way to fuel recovery

April 22, 2009

The effort to open up Florida's waters to oil drilling illustrates how ill-equipped the legislative leadership is to rebuild the state's economy.

The same lawmakers who believe an overbuilt state with a backlog of unsold homes needs to eliminate development controls also think that allowing oil rigs to crowd close to Florida's beaches will ease its financial woes.

It is a dangerous pipedream, one that could ruin Florida's economy and coastal waters.

The drilling - which requires the use of heavy metal, toxic metals and polluting muds - would not occur far offshore in federal waters, where perhaps a case can be made for additional drilling.

This legislation applies to state-controlled waters from three to 10 miles offshore. It would be possible for rigs to operate within sight of shore.

Supporters say new technologies minimize the visual disruption and pollution threat. Perhaps. But drilling immediately offshore provides the state no margin of error when the inevitable accident occurs.

Yet Rep. Dean Cannon, an Orlando Republican scheduled to become House speaker next year, thinks this would benefit a state whose clean waters and sandy beaches underpin its appeal and sustain a \$65-billion-a-year tourism industry that employs 1 million people.

Under the proposal the governor and members of the Cabinet would vote on oil companies' exploration requests. The companies would have to post a \$500 million bond. It is being pushed hard by the oil industry and affiliated special interests. A House panel approved it Tuesday.

This misguided effort was abruptly launched in the final weeks of the session, revealing a stunning disregard for the need to carefully scrutinize a change with such dramatic impacts.

Even more alarming is how this scheme shows legislative leaders are looking to the past rather than trying to seize new economic opportunities.

President Barack Obama's administration clearly is going to emphasize clean, renewable energy and seek to reduce the nation's dependence on oil. Just last week the U.S Environmental Protection Agency signaled it would eventually use the Clean Air Act to limit the use of greenhouse gases.

One does not have to accept the doomsayers' warnings about climate change to recognize the nation's energy dynamics will change.

And the transition to clean domestically produced energy sources is expected to create millions of American jobs and make the nation more energy independent. Florida has the potential to generate energy and jobs from biomass, solar, wind and waves.

Yet the same House leadership that would put Florida's beaches at risk has refused to consider reasonable legislation that would help boost investment in renewables.

The measure, as fashioned by the Senate, would require electric utilities to obtain 20 percent of their power from clean energy by 2020. It is not overly burdensome. It even allows clean coal technology and nuclear to be counted toward that renewable energy target.

The legislation, besides assuring Florida a cleaner energy supply, would ignite investment in homegrown industries.

Instead of looking for ways to build an economy - and energy industry - for the future, the House simply seeks to turn the Florida coast over to Big Oil. That won't produce many jobs. It won't revive the economy. And it could forever taint Florida's coastal waters.

But it will please powerful special interests - and that appears to be what counts the most in the state House.

THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

Shameful oil drilling ploy

Tuesday, April 21, 2009

House Speaker-designate Dean Cannon's attempt to pitch his legislation to open waters off Florida's shores to drilling as the beginning of a "mature, thoughtful conversation" about the state's energy future is an insult to Floridians and disingenuous. House Republican leaders are showing a shameless willingness to put the interests of a powerful industry over their constituents' in pursuit of an easy buck.

Cannon, R-Orlando, sprang the radical idea to allow oil rigs within 3 miles of the coast in the eighth week of a nine-week legislative session. And he did it even as the House has failed to consider the governor's plan to foster renewable energy. Florida needs more than 10 days to consider changing a law that has protected its shores for decades, and the Senate and governor should reject it.

Clearly, Associated Industries of Florida has been working with Cannon for weeks to try to reverse a 20-year drilling ban — though Cannon unveiled it just 12 hours before it passed a House council Tuesday. A pollster hired to do a survey, an industry expert from Texas and an Orlando economist touting potential revenue all testified. Cannon contended HB 1219 is merely an attempt "to have a mature, thoughtful conversation about what we want to do about this." So why is the public just now hearing about it?

The answer: The industry is preying on Tallahassee's desperation for new revenue that doesn't involve raising taxes. And it's hoping to avoid scrutiny for a plan that does nothing for the state's

current fiscal crisis, endangers pristine beaches and does little to solve America's energy problems.

Cannon's plan would require the governor and Cabinet to accept \$1 million application fees from bidders interested in exploring state-controlled waters that stretch to 10 miles offshore. If a bid is accepted, the state would require a \$500 million bond before drilling and one-eighth of royalties.

Industry officials contend new technology greatly reduces potential for environmental hazards. And they happily note there were no major problems from offshore platforms from Hurricane Katrina. But Louisiana officials say 8.2 million gallons of oil were spilled during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, including damage the storms did to onshore storage sites and pipelines. That infrastructure would likely grow in Florida if offshore drilling began within 10 miles of the coast.

It would be years before Florida would reap significant financial rewards from drilling, which would do little to lessen the nation's dependence on foreign oil. Cannon notes his bill doesn't require drilling — the governor and Cabinet could reject bids "contrary to the public welfare." But that is a dramatically weaker standard than most state environmental protections where applicants must prove plans won't harm the environment.

The Republican's late-session surprise appears to be a politically calculated move to appeal to an industry with deep pockets, and it would put Florida at unnecessary risk. It hardly reflects the caliber of public policy or leadership expected from a lawmaker who aspires to hold one of the most powerful political offices in the state.

FT MYERS NEWS-PRESS

EDITORIAL: Stop sneak attack on drilling ban

It's a good idea to permit cautious oil and natural gas exploration in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, in federal waters well off Florida's coast.

But surprise legislation now whizzing through the state House of Representatives to lift the drilling ban in waters close to the state's beaches and bays is a sneak attack.

It is calculated to circumvent the full debate this important issue needs, and could backfire on proponents of drilling by reversing a favorable recent trend in public opinion toward drilling.

Keeping rigs well offshore provides a buffer that, in the unlikely event of a spill, allows the oil to disperse or be contained before it can damage our priceless tourist beaches and rich coastal bays.

The proposal would lift the state ban on drilling in Florida waters from 3 to 10 miles out, giving the governor and Cabinet the power to lease sea bottom for oil and gas exploration and production.

The proponents of House Bill 1219 and its companion Senate Bill 2294 make a good case for offshore drilling in general: State-of-the-art drilling has an excellent safety record, surviving recent strong hurricanes with no significant offshore spills; drilling could generate billions in royalties to the state and create thousands of jobs; natural gas is a relatively clean fuel that could help reduce U.S. dependence on foreign fossil fuels.

With such a strong case to be made for offshore drilling, there's no need to try to slip this legislation through in the waning days of a session.

Gov. Charlie Crist has said his mind is open on offshore drilling well offshore. He has indicated he will look at this proposal, too.

But the governor and the state Senate should block this initiative until it can be looked at with the care it needs.

NAPLES NEWS

Editorial: Offshore oil drilling ... what's driving the timing of late-session legislation?

Wednesday, April 22, 2009

What's the rush?

In the waning days of a legislative session that was touted as being all about balancing a budget in difficult times, with a dash of Indian gaming mixed in, a proposal to allow oil exploration as close as three miles off the Florida coast makes a late appearance.

Oil rigs three miles offshore? This is no small matter. It ought not be treated as an afterthought.

Even proponents of domestic energy production, the "drill here, drill now" crowd, have to take pause at the suddenness with which the issue popped up on the Tuesday agenda of the Florida House Policy Council.

The fact that its supporters were well-prepared to make their case and likely opponents in the environmental community were given scant notice to form a rebuttal suggests a strategy that seeks to avoid, rather than welcome, the sunshine of open governance.

The billions of dollars supporters of close-in offshore oil drilling say their plan could produce would come in future years and do little to plug the holes in the budget the Legislature is now trying to piece together, thereby eliminating the only possible argument for accelerated consideration — that the money would bail us out of today's jam.

There is a substantial inventory of potential oil and gas exploration sites remaining unused. Plus, oil alone is not the future. A combination of energy, including solar and biofuels already

advanced by and in Florida, is more on point. The integrity of Florida's beaches and marine life is more important than hurry-up politics.

There is no reason we know of that the important questions only touched upon in Tuesday's hearing — can Florida really thrive as a tourist mecca with rigs as close as three miles? Does putting the say-so in the hands of the governor and Cabinet, as opposed to the whole Legislature, grant too much power to too few people? — can't be fully explored at a later date.

That means a time and place announced well in advance, with advocates on both sides as well as the public informed of the pros and cons heading in.

FLORIDA (JACKSONVILLE) TIMES UNION

Surprise move to drill in Gulf makes for bad splash

By [Ron Littlepage](#)

Thursday, Apr. 23, 2009

Republicans in the Legislature are once again using the lousy economy as cover for another assault on the environment.

Previously they plotted to weaken environmental permitting regulations to the delight of developers.

Then on Tuesday, which happened to be the day before Earth Day, they unveiled a plan to lift the state's ban on drilling for oil and gas in Florida's offshore waters in the Gulf of Mexico.

The surprise amendment - authored by Rep. Dean Cannon, who is in line to be the next House speaker - came with a little more than a week left in this legislative session.

It would give the governor and Cabinet the authority to grant offshore leases as close as three miles to the Gulf's beaches.

Cannon told reporters in Tallahassee that "I just want to start a dialogue." Apparently, he wanted the dialogue to be one-sided.

When the House Policy Council took up the amendment, supporters were in full force and they obviously had been working on the idea for some time.

Representatives of the Associated Industries of Florida were there. Also in tow were the normal hired guns - a pollster, an economist and public relations people.

According to news reports, Cannon made a lengthy pitch that included a Power Point presentation complete with handouts, charts and photos.

Traditional opponents to offshore drilling - environmentalists, tourism officials, anglers, beachgoers and some politicians - hadn't been let in on the deal.

"I apologize for not having a fancy presentation," Susan Glickman, an environmental lobbyist, was quoted in news reports as saying. "We did not get the same memo."

That's not the way to encourage a dialogue, especially on an issue this important and with so little session time left.

The House council approved the amendment. The main hook is the projection that Florida could get as much as \$1.6 billion in royalties a year.

But tourism alone - with the state's beaches being a big draw - produces about \$4 billion a year in sales tax revenue.

Would beaches covered with tar balls or an oil spill attract as many visitors? Obviously no.

A real dialogue - not a monologue - might very well be worth having.

Lessening our country's dependence on foreign oil makes sense for national security, but so does increasing alternative energy sources.

More revenue for the state when critical needs are going unmet and the creation of thousands of jobs also can't be ignored.

But is drilling as environmentally safe as those who sprang this idea at the last-minute claim?

The Florida Oceans and Coastal Resources Council says coastal activities pump more than \$400 billion into the state's economy every year.

That's a lot to gamble with.

SARASOTA HERALD TRIBUNE

A Mandate for drilling

Little-noticed legislation could have far-reaching impact on Florida's coast

April 23, 2009

Proponents of voiding state and federal bans on oil and gas drilling in Florida's waters -- specifically, off the West Coast -- portray pending legislation as a benign, incremental effort to allow "conversation" and "dialogue."

But, despite its brevity, House Bill 1219 provides a far-reaching mandate that demands thorough review and debate which it has not yet received.

The bill, amended and approved this week by a key group in the Florida House of Representatives, directs the Department of Environmental Protection to "develop a plan, including legislative recommendations, for the implementation of an offshore oil and natural gas drilling program ..."

Note that the bill does not simply provide for discussions. It would require a plan for implementing oil and gas drilling in Florida's coastal waters.

HB 1219 also calls for the plan to provide "protection to the state's environment," but it is clearly designed for "facilitating the recovery and distribution of offshore oil and natural gas reserves."

Furthermore, one version of the bill considered in the House mandated "an expedited permitting process for all offshore and onshore activities associated with ... oil and natural gas products."

The proposed legislation would put the DEP's planning on a fast track: The bill provides for the plan to be submitted by Dec. 31, 2009, to the Legislature for consideration.

The House's powerful Policy Council voted 17-7 Tuesday in favor of the bill. Representatives from our region cast opposite votes: Keith Fitzgerald, a Sarasota Democrat, voted no; Bill Galvano, a Bradenton Republican, voted yes.

A floor vote is the next step in the House.

Fortunately, a companion bill in the Senate is stalled. It should stay that way

There are serious problems with the legislation, in process and substance.

A rushed process

The process has been rushed. The first committee hearing -- in the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Committee -- didn't occur until March 24.

The bill didn't gain significant attention until it was heard Tuesday -- late in the Legislature's annual 60-day session -- and pushed out of the Policy Council without full consideration of all sides of the debate.

As Rep. Fitzgerald told Herald-Tribune reporter Joe Follick: "I don't see why we have to wait until 10 days" before the end of the session, hear "an hourlong PowerPoint presentation from one side, then be asked to make a decision."

The problems with the substance of HB 1212 are even more serious. Consider that:

The bill would allow proposals for drilling as close as three miles off Florida's West Coast, in an area extending from Pensacola to Naples. Since 1990, Florida has explicitly banned exploration and drilling in such areas, up to 10 miles offshore; for 26 years, the federal government protected huge sections of the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

Those protections were supported by Republican and Democratic administrations and lawmakers because they recognized that the value of Florida's tourism, recreation and environment far outweighs any potential benefits of drilling near the coast.

Threat to tourism economy

Proponents note that states such as Mississippi and Louisiana gain millions of dollars annually through lease royalties, and contend that Florida could gain \$31 billion in revenues over 20 years. Compare those impacts, if they materialized, to the value of Florida's \$50-billion-a-year tourism industry, which is highly dependent on clean beaches and waters.

There are conflicting opinions on the risk of oil spills from drilling rigs and pipelines, especially in the hurricane-prone Gulf of Mexico. The potential of the bill to open the way for refineries on Florida's West Coast adds another layer of concern. In sum, the risks and costs should be part of any analysis of the possible financial benefits.

There is no compelling evidence that opening Florida's waters to drilling -- for oil, in particular -- would drive down prices at the fuel pump or lead to "energy independence."

The United States has less than 3 percent of the world's oil reserves but consumes 25 percent of the supply. Even so, as of last year, less than a quarter of the 90 million acres of federal lands leased to oil companies were being used to provide oil or gas.

The U.S. Department of Energy has consistently reported that untapped domestic supplies are so minimal -- relative to Americans' rate of consumption -- that untapped reserves don't have the capacity to significantly affect prices or reduce dependency on foreign sources. The Energy Department has also reported that it would take up to 10 years for areas under new leases to produce fuel for consumption.

Another agency, the U.S. Energy Information Administration, said in 2007 that increasing "access to the Pacific, Atlantic and eastern Gulf regions would not have a significant impact on domestic crude oil and natural gas production or prices before 2030."

If Florida and the nation wait until 2020 or 2030 to implement vigorous alternative-energy strategies, no amount of domestic production would likely make a positive impact economically, politically or environmentally.

Gov. Charlie Crist persuaded the Legislature in 2007 to adopt goals for reducing the state's reliance on oil and other fossil fuels by taking steps to reduce demands and increase the viability of alternative sources.

The governor and a task force recognized that the environmental and economic risks of waiting to adopt new policies and strategies for energy. Bills pending in the Legislature would guide Florida in the right way; HB 1219 would send the state in wrong direction, in the belief that the state and nation can drill their way toward progress.

SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL

New drilling bill is a preposterous giveaway

April 24, 2009

Rep. Dean Cannon's plan to open Florida's coast to oil and gas drilling deserves all the ridicule it's getting, given its sheer preposterousness.

But it's folly to deride the plan without also appreciating the possibility of it actually passing Florida's Legislature, which is desperate for revenue.

The state's facing a \$6 billion deficit and shortfalls in ensuing years if it doesn't make deep cuts in services and tap new revenue sources. Cannon's plan — ridding the state of its drilling ban by giving the energy industry the chance to set up rigs three to 10 miles offshore — would give the state some of that revenue.

Any company wanting to apply for the chance to troll the waters would have to pay the state a \$1 million non-refundable application fee. According to the oil industry, the state also could collect \$1.6 billion in royalties and taxes if the wells produce oil.

But here's where things get ridiculous. Cannon says the governor and Cabinet would be under "no obligation whatsoever" to approve them.

Right. The oil industry will happily pay a million dollars for one application after another without the expectation that the state will approve many of them?

And if the idea's to make it difficult to obtain a drilling permit, why give the governor and Cabinet every chance to approve them? Oil firms could skirt standards set up for other applicants in Florida. Rather, the governor and Cabinet would just have to find the applications "not contrary to the public welfare."

More nonsense from Cannon, R-Winter Park, comes wrapped in promises that money raised from drilling could fund Florida Forever. The unpredictability of oil-lease payments working to help finance the state's land-buying program is a pipe dream.

But if Cannon's giveaway is approved, things could get really dangerous. The Minerals Management Service, which regulates offshore drilling, reported 124 oil spills caused by hurricanes in 2005.

No wonder why Congress has imposed a drilling ban in the Gulf of Mexico covering federal waters 10 to 125 miles off Florida's coast. The state shouldn't undermine that wise ban with this nonsense.

THE MIAMI HERALD

OUR OPINION: Greased bill should be allowed to die a quiet death

April 22, 2009

A bill passed by the House Policy Council on Tuesday was the first crack in the heretofore impenetrable wall against oil and gas drilling off Florida's coast in the Gulf of Mexico. Supporters, however, used a stacked deck to get the job done.

Council members heard a well-prepared, carefully calibrated pitch from oil and gas officials using facts and figures, and a favorable industry-supported poll showing weakening opposition to drilling. The amendment, however, wasn't made available for the public to see until Monday night -- leaving no time for real debate.

Drilling ban

The bill (HB 1219) passed 17-6 along party lines, with Rep. Yolly Roberson, D-Miami, the only Democrat voting in favor. The bill opens a door to drilling that has been closed for 30 years. It replaces Florida's ban on drilling with a plan that allows the governor and Cabinet to accept proposals for oil and gas exploration. The state could charge \$1 million for each application to explore a limited area between 3 and 10 miles offshore. Despite the bill's poor prospects -- a similar measure in the Senate isn't moving -- the lure of easy money during a recession should not be underestimated.

The measure represents a breach in years of solid opposition among Florida politicians, Republicans and Democrats, to offshore drilling. Even still, there is no good reason to reverse Florida's well-justified opposition to drilling. Gov. Crist should veto any measure that reaches his desk.

Support of Florida's ban on offshore drilling has slipped in recent years as the cost of gas ballooned to more than \$4 per gallon. In 2006, President

George W. Bush signed a law opening up drilling in the western Gulf but, because of environmental concerns for Florida's coastline, the law prohibited drilling within 100 to 125 miles off the state's coast.

Drilling advocates, including Associated Industries of Florida, say that increasing worldwide demand for oil supports the need for offshore drilling and improved technology makes it possible to drill more safely. "Today's new, advanced technology makes it possible to extract oil and natural gas in a way that largely protects viewsapes from the shore and preserves coastal environments," AIF president Barney Bishop said in an e-mail to newspapers.

Storing and transporting

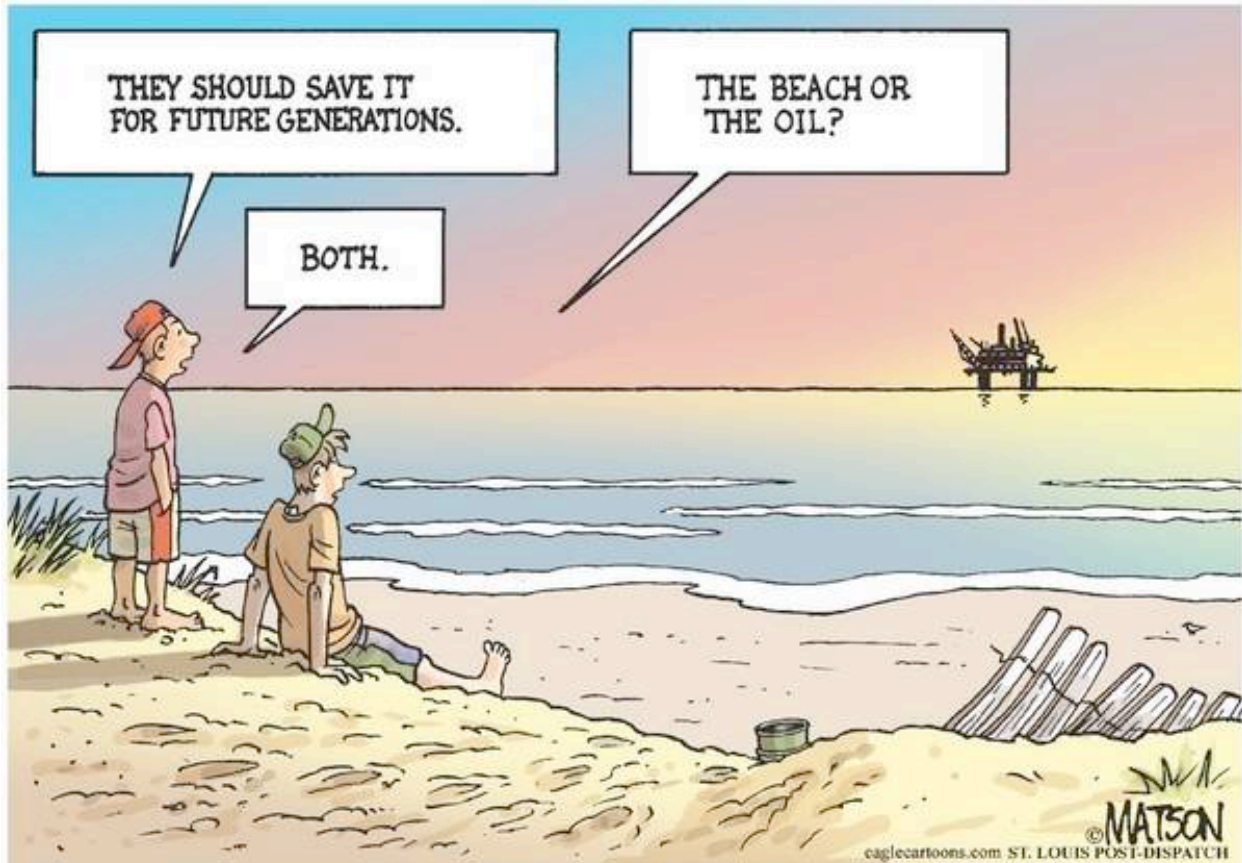
Accidental spills during drilling aren't the only concern, nor are they the biggest risk. Just as much or more environmental degradation comes from storing and transporting oil and gas. Coast Guard data show that between 1973 and 2000, tankers spilled an average of 1.3 million gallons of oil in U.S. marine waters.

Besides that, there is a more prudent reason to reject drilling off Florida's coast: a paucity of oil in the area under consideration. Of the 9.22 trillion gallons of natural gas and 2.8 billion barrels of oil believed to be in the eastern Gulf, most of the reserves are many miles off Florida's coast line.

This bill should die with the Policy Council's vote. That is the fate it deserves.

GAINESVILLE SUN

Editorial: Sneak attack



Cagle Cartoons

April 24

Proponents of voiding state and federal bans on oil and gas drilling in Florida's waters portray pending legislation as a benign, incremental effort to allow "conversation" and "dialogue." House Bill 1219 is anything but that.

The bill, amended and approved this week by a key group in the Florida House of Representatives, directs the Department of Environmental Protection to "develop a plan, including legislative recommendations, for the implementation of an offshore oil and natural gas drilling program ..."

It would put the DEP's planning on a fast track: a plan must be submitted by Dec. 31, 2009.

The bill would allow proposals for drilling as close as three miles off Florida's West Coast, in an area extending from Pensacola to Naples. Since 1990, Florida has explicitly banned exploration and drilling in such areas, up to 10 miles offshore; for 26 years, the federal government protected huge sections of the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

Proponents note that states such as Mississippi and Louisiana gain millions of dollars annually through lease royalties, and contend that Florida could gain \$31 billion in revenues over 20 years. Compare those impacts, if they materialized, to the value of Florida's \$50-billion-a-year tourism industry, which is highly dependent on clean beaches and waters.

There is no compelling evidence that opening Florida's waters to drilling would drive down prices at the fuel pump or lead to "energy independence."

The United States has less than 3 percent of the world's oil reserves but consumes 25 percent of the supply. Even so, as of last year, less than a quarter of the 90 million acres of federal lands leased to oil companies were being used to provide oil or gas.

The U.S. Department of Energy has consistently reported that untapped domestic supplies are so minimal that untapped reserves don't have the capacity to significantly affect prices or reduce dependency on foreign sources.

The Energy Department has also reported that it would take up to 10 years for areas under new leases to produce fuel for consumption.

Alas, once a staunch opponent of drilling, Gov. Charlie Crist now says he's got an "open-mind" about the issue. Sadly, that's exactly the sort of blow-with-the-prevailing-political-winds posturing we've come to expect from the governor.

We agree with Florida's U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, who said Wednesday: "Those who now propose to allow oil rigs know full well the plan will do nothing to reduce energy prices or reduce our country's reliance on oil. This simply is the agenda of big-oil interests hiding behind shadowy advocacy groups and controlling Florida's lawmakers."

It is a cruel joke that lawmakers chose the occasion of Earth Week to spring this ill-conceived assault on Florida's environmental wellbeing. Floridians shouldn't stand for it.

The Palm Beach Post

Drilling bill is rigged

By [Randy Schultz](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Sunday, April 26, 2009

Tallahassee behaved last week the way Tallahassee can behave when a powerful special interest wants something. In other words, Tallahassee acted against the public interest.

First, no major bills are supposed to arrive unannounced during the next-to-last week of the legislative session. Among other things, there's almost no time for debate. That applies this year especially, given the budget talk.

But Monday night an e-mail went out from a Tallahassee public relations firm saying that the state "has begun a healthy new dialogue based on facts, not fear, regarding possible exploration and production of oil and natural gas in the state's Gulf of Mexico waters." Tuesday afternoon, a follow-up release advertised a "conversation about taking a bold step to empower (the state's) economy through oil and gas exploration" that could mean rigs just 1 mile from the beach.

A conference call had been set up. A poll, concluding that Floridians would be OK with drilling, was ready. An economist had been hired to say that oil and gas "exploration" could bring Florida \$1.6 billion a year from lease payments and royalties and create 19,000 jobs. Nearly two dozen lobbyists were at work.

But didn't the state, under Jeb Bush, buy back \$12.5 million in energy leases four years ago to protect the Gulf coast between Apalachicola and Naples from drilling? Didn't most of the state's congressional delegation back the effort by U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., to keep rigs no closer than 125 miles and in some places 235 miles? Wasn't the big energy issue of this session supposed to be how ambitious Florida would be on renewable energy? Didn't Florida TaxWatch also on Tuesday report that solar energy could create 100,000 jobs?

Yes, yes, yes and yes. Clearly, though, this "Drill, baby, drill" campaign had been orchestrated for weeks, with the idea of springing it at the last minute. Rep. Dean Cannon, R-Winter Park, is in line to be House speaker in 2011 and 2012. He replaced an innocuous one-page bill (HB 1219) that would have created a plan for offshore drilling with a 19-page bill that would wipe out the state's ban on drilling within 10 miles of the coast.

Sen. Nelson's action protected the area between 10 miles and 125 miles from the coast. He presumed that the state would never change the rules for its territorial waters, not with Florida's tourist industry so dependent on those beautiful Gulf beaches.

Tough times, though, create possibilities for all sorts of mischief in the name of economic development. Anyway, House leaders never shared Gov. Crist's enthusiasm for renewable energy. This week, the House could stick HB 1219 onto its lame renewable energy bill and send it to the Senate, whose bill sets a goal of 20 percent clean energy by 2020. To get even that modest goal into state law, the Senate might have to take the drilling bill. The Senate sponsor said he was open to the idea.

And what a bad idea it would be. Supporters breathlessly compare the financial potential to what Louisiana and Texas receive. But those states don't rely on beaches for tourism, as Florida does. More important, companies that discovered oil wouldn't want to ship it all the way across the Gulf. That would be too expensive. They would want refineries nearby. How many tourists would come to the Florida Gulf coast if it looked like Refinery Row around Port Arthur, Texas? Drilling might give; it also might take.

In an attempt to win support from environmental groups, the bill says that \$300 million from drilling could go to the state's land-preservation program. No one could guarantee that.

Florida produces more farm waste suitable for energy production than any other state. Solar and wind possibilities are obvious, and Florida Power & Light, the state's largest utility, agrees that human activity causes global warming. Yet if this bill passes and Gov. Crist signs it, Dick Cheney might as well be making energy policy for this state.

If Florida got any serious money from drilling, it wouldn't come for years. The serious damage to Florida would be immediate. Tallahassee isn't just behaving badly. Tallahassee is ready to sell out the state.

Naples News

Columnist Brent Batten: Poll fails to go the extra mile(s)

By [BRENT BATTEN](#)
April 25, 2009

According to pro-business lobbying group Associated Industries of Florida, 59 percent of Floridians favor oil and gas exploration off Florida's coast.

Only they don't say how far off.

The AIF-sponsored Mason-Dixon poll of 625 registered voters conducted April 15 and 16 asked participants, "Do you generally support

or oppose drilling for oil in the waters off of the coast of Florida?”

Nearly six in 10 responded yes. Another poll question suggested energy production could bring in significant revenue for education, health care and other needs. Nearly 80 percent said they would favor drilling if it did.

Associated Industries of Florida (AIF) is touting those numbers as proof of public support of a measure before the Florida Legislature to open state waters to oil and gas drilling.

But the question makes no mention of the proximity of the wells to the coast.

For the past few years, Florida has been at the center of a dizzying debate in Washington and Tallahassee over energy exploration in federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico. But that debate, and all the media coverage it generated, was about activity 50 miles or more from shore.

So when Floridians formed an opinion on drilling, they did so in the context of 50, 100 or even 200 miles out.

The debate now, the one for which the poll was targeted, is about drilling three to 10 miles out. Big difference.

AIF President Barney Bishop admits the results might have been different if mention of the three- to 10-mile range had been made in the poll question.

“The number would change, no doubt about it,” Bishop said.

But he believes a majority of Floridians would still support drilling.

The questions repeatedly mention the “Florida coast,” which Bishop says implies that the drilling would be close to shore, as opposed to far out in the Gulf.

But in the discussion over federal waters the term “off the Florida coast” was consistently used to define waters closer to Florida than any other state.

Currently, there is a federal moratorium on energy exploration closer than 125 miles off Florida’s coast (there’s that term again).

Only about 7 percent of respondents said they would oppose drilling, even if it could be proven to be environmentally safe.

“The vast majority of Floridians have always been in the middle,” Bishop said.

The oil industry has a record of no offshore drilling spills dating back to 1969 in Santa Barbara, Calif., Bishop said, noting that even Hurricane Katrina caused no such spills in 2005.

The equipment being considered for use in state waters would be mostly under water, meaning it would be invisible from the coast except for the weeks a ship would be on site drilling the well.

An impressive track record and the potential to bring jobs, billions of dollars to the state’s economy and a step toward national energy independence are all arguments in favor of oil exploration in state waters.

The sudden nature with which the issue appeared on the legislative radar in the waning weeks of the session, lingering environmental concerns and the accuracy of the supporters’ financial forecasts are arguments against it.

An AIF survey that fails to inform respondents of just what waters we’re talking about falls more into the category of the latter than the former.

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