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An incoherent energy policy

The Obama administration remains opposed to the Keystone XL pipeline for its supposed potential to harm the environment. Meanwhile, it announced Tuesday that offshore exploration for oil off the Atlantic coast is OK.

Say what?

And if that's not enough cognitive dissonance, the general support of offshore drilling by South Carolina's leadership adds to the confusion.

Gov. Nikki Haley, for example, hailed offshore oil exploration as "a critical economic development issue," when by its nature, it poses a threat to coastal tourism, an essential component of the state's economic health. If Gov. Haley wants to "make safeguarding our rich natural resources a priority," as she stated Tuesday, then she should do so — by opposing an industry that inevitably risks it.

Offshore drilling may be safer than it was before the 2010 BP blowout in the Gulf of Mexico — we certainly hope so — but the industry can't provide an absolute assurance of safety for coastal waters and pristine wetlands that serve as vital habitat for marine life. Or to the beaches that are a primary lure to 19 million coastal tourists a year.

Chris DeScherer, an attorney for the Southern Environmental Law Center, described the federal decision as "a threat to the environment, the economy and the lifestyle of living in the Lowcountry." And the threat isn't solely to the environment, "but the businesses and the tourism industry," he said.

The offshore drilling plan reflects a topsy-turvy set of priorities that is underscored by the administration's opposition to Keystone. The pipeline would be used to transport oil from Canada to the U.S. in a manner that is safer from spills than rail transportation. Without the pipeline, another option for the crude oil is shipping it to China.

Meanwhile, the steep drop in global oil prices over the last six months has derailed, at least for now, the surge in U.S. fracking. That casts doubts on the economic viability of expanded domestic production.

The offshore drilling decision was made in the shadow of the BP's Deepwater Horizon blowout, which could cost BP nearly \$14 billion in federal fines, assuming it isn't able to beg off to a lower figure because of falling oil prices.

The oil industry's assurance of putting rigs "out of sight" from the South Carolina shore would not be to put them "out of mind."