

Jersey takes on Big Oil, and Jersey wins. Thanks, Obama

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Sen. Bob Menendez addresses the crowd about protecting the environment from drilling. On the Asbury Park Boardwalk, U.S. Senators Bob Menendez and Cory Booker, U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. and local community leaders will join together on the Asbury Park Boardwalk to voice their opposition to possible drilling off the Atlantic coast. Sunday January 31, 2016. Asbury Park, NJ, USA (Aristide Economopoulos | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

Drilling for oil and gas will go on for the foreseeable future, but it's reassuring that the Obama administration has begun to apply the brakes and chosen to govern by common sense and market trends rather than corporate profit.

No doubt, this is a NIMBY issue for New Jersey: [The decision to abandon the plan](#) to drill in the mid-Atlantic and southern Atlantic is a victory for our shoreline and the millions of lives that depend on it.

But we can't burn the reserves we already have in the ground, lest we want to overheat the planet to an uninhabitable degree, so there is no point in disrupting the entire coastal economy digging for more fossil fuels that we cannot afford to use.

The president recognized this, and despite pressure from the oil industry and royalty-seeking politicians from Virginia to Georgia, he made the right call – especially for New Jersey.

The first reason is safety: Since the BP disaster desecrated 1,000 miles of coastline in the Gulf, there has been [no change](#) in the safety regulations. The Atlantic Coast is sustained by its tourism and fishing industries; economies and diverse wildlife populations that rely on healthy oceans would be devastated by the kind of accidents that could result from offshore drilling.

No doubt, the fossil fuel industry considered Atlantic fertile ground. But twenty times as much oil can be found in Alaska, and 10 times more can be found in the Gulf. When they drilled 50 wells in the Atlantic in the 1980s, they did not produce a drop.

[This plan](#) wasn't going to produce oil for at least 10 years, either. By then, who knows what breakthroughs there may be in renewables – such as the [wind farm now planned](#) for the area off Sandy Hook — and car battery technology?

And worst of all, the leasing zone would start just 90 miles south of Cape May – too close for comfort, as Doug O'Malley of Environment New Jersey put it, "because oil spills don't pay attention to state lines."

['Nobody messes with Jersey,' Booker says](#) U.S. Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) speaks out against offshore oil drilling in the Atlantic Ocean at a rally on the Asbury Park boardwalk on Jan. 31, 2016. (Video by Alex Napoliello | NJ Advance Media)

New Jersey's [tourism industry](#) supports 318,330 jobs, and indirectly supports nearly twice that many. That's 10 percent of our total employment. It also generated \$37.3 billion of our state GDP in 2015 (6.6 percent of our economy), which provides \$4.7 billion in state and local tax revenue.

Why would anyone jeopardize that?

A more pertinent question: Remember the Syringe Tide of 1988, when medical waste from the Staten Island landfill washed up on our shores? Tourism dropped 22 percent, and New Jersey lost \$1 billion.



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The Atlantic lease would take effect in 2017, but there is no guarantee of finding oil, and there are always risks to the environment

So reason has prevailed, and the oil companies lost this round, because some formidable opposition fell in line behind the New Jersey's Congressional delegation, notably Sens. Cory Booker and Robert Menendez, and Rep. Frank Pallone (D-6th Dist.).

The unique coalition included environmental groups, coastal industries, 100 shore communities and its multitudes, the Pentagon, and even [pro-business conservatives](#) who weighed oil revenue against the threat to tourism and concluded that it wasn't worth the risk.

It won't be their last battle against the richest corporations in the world. A new administration might have another opinion about offshore drilling. But for now, our elected leaders did their jobs by protecting hallowed ground and the wellbeing of future generations.

http://www.nj.com/opinion/index.ssf/2016/03/jersey_takes_on_big_oil_and_jersey_wins_thanks_oba.html