



Reversal of offshore drilling plan is welcome

Reversing plan to allow offshore drilling was triumph of the democratic process

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With SC's natural resources hanging in the balance, potential returns don't justify risk

By The Herald Editorial Board

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The Obama administration's decision Tuesday to reverse its plan to allow offshore drilling along the southeast Atlantic coast was a triumph of the democratic process and the power of public opinion.

Last year, the Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management released a draft of a five-year-plan that included leasing waters off the coast from Georgia to Virginia beginning in 2021. The bureau also asked groups potentially affected by the plan to send in their comments.

Officials might not have realized the response that request would unleash. The government received more than a million comments on the proposal, most of them negative.

Residents in every state within the proposed drilling area organized grassroots groups to fight the plan. But the response from South Carolina was exceptionally vocal.

Every coastal city council in the state passed a resolution against the plan. And those who protested the plan represented a much broader coalition than simply environmentalists or those who oppose Big Oil.

Local chambers of commerce and officials with the state's tourism industry were prominent opponents. They view offshore drilling as a threat to the state's beaches and wildlife habitats that are the backbone of an industry that attracts millions of visitors to the state each year.

Those who rely on the Atlantic fisheries – both sportsmen and professional trawlers – also strongly opposed the plan. And, of course, thousands of ordinary citizens joined the effort to reverse the plan out of fear of another accident like the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Even the Pentagon officially protested the plan, saying it could interfere with live training exercises, military maneuvers and missile tests off the coastline. The military has a number of major bases along the coast, including Marine Base Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, and Naval Station Norfolk and Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia.

Supporters of offshore drilling, including Gov. Nikki Haley, claimed that it would both create jobs and help make the nation less dependent on foreign oil. But the claim rings hollow when oil companies are shutting down rigs nationwide because it is not economical to continue to operate low-producing rigs when oil is selling for around \$30 a barrel.

Exploring for oil in the deep waters of the Atlantic can be far more costly and more difficult than doing so on land. The process also is more prone to accidental spills.

While the original plan would have limited drilling to at least 50 miles off the coastline, the crude oil still would have had to be transported to refineries, either by pipelines or tankers. There is no foolproof way to ensure against a spill, and with South Carolina's precious natural resources hanging in the balance, the potential returns could not justify the risk.

Haley called Tuesday's decision "just another disappointment from D.C." By all indications, however, the decision was a response to an outcry from a large and diverse group of citizens up and down the Atlantic coast telling the government that its plan was unacceptable.

That's not disappointing. That's a great day in South Carolina.

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