



Right decision on offshore drilling

StarNews Editorial Board

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Tourism and seafood interests along the North Carolina coast have dodged a bullet with the March 15 decision by the Obama administration not to allow oil drilling off the Atlantic Coast.

The issue divided local governments and citizens along party lines, with Republicans generally favoring efforts to drill for offshore oil and Democrats mostly opposed to the idea.

North Carolina's Republican Gov. Pat McCrory quickly condemned the administration's action as "a special political favor to far-left activists."

Sen. Thom Tillis said in a release that he was "extremely disappointed in the Obama administration's decision to effectively end this debate before it even starts."

We would argue that the debate has been going on for quite some time, and that the citizens have made their preferences known.

While Brunswick and Carteret counties passed resolutions supporting drilling off the N.C. coast, dozens of coastal municipalities went on record opposing it.

The issue was pivotal in Kure Beach's 2015 mayoral race after then-Mayor Dean Lambeth signed a letter supporting seismic exploration for offshore oil.

Emilie Swearingen, a Kure Beach commissioner, made offshore drilling a central issue in her campaign for mayor and beat the incumbent with 54 percent of the votes.

A couple of months later, the Kure Beach Town council voted to become the 100th municipality to formally oppose offshore drilling.

The people had spoken.

Apparently the Obama administration listened, even if McCrory, Tillis and others did not.

The dollars and jobs that offshore drilling might contribute to the state's economy pale in comparison to the benefits of coastal tourism and the fishing industry.

The negative economic impact of an oil spill such as the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico would far outweigh the revenues that would come from offshore production.

Drilling proponents say we've learned lessons from 2010, that drilling safety is improved. But no one can credibly say it won't happen again.

We're not opposed to all domestic oil production. We are happy that gasoline is under \$2 a gallon, and we are aware that domestic production is a big reason why we can fill up our tanks without great wailing and gnashing of teeth.

But we applaud the Obama administration for reversing its plan to allow drilling off the Atlantic Coast starting in 2021. The risks outweigh the benefits.

The issue is likely to get a new airing in the coming presidential and congressional campaigns. We'll be watching to see how it plays out.

But for right now it's a simple economic analysis -- the costs and risks of offshore drilling outweigh any benefits.

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