



Offshore drilling: All risk, no reward

Why is Larry Hogan so unconcerned about a potential oil spill threatening Maryland's coast?

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Responding to a caller on WBAL News Radio's C4 Show on Tuesday, Gov. Larry Hogan made clear he wasn't happy with Attorney General Brian Frosh taking legal positions such as [the amicus brief in support of immigration reform](#) he filed earlier this year. While acknowledging that Mr. Frosh, a Democrat, was elected to office in his own right and has that authority, Mr. Hogan said he found such behavior to be frustrating.

"His latest move was in today's paper," Mr. Hogan added, clearly fuming. "[He was] grandstanding in the paper on an issue that's already decided and Maryland has nothing to do with."

What issue had so incensed Maryland's Republican governor that he felt obliged to call Mr. Frosh out on it? The attorney general had [announced his "strong opposition"](#) to federal permitting of oil and gas drilling off the Atlantic coast, fearful that an accidental discharge could wreak havoc on Maryland's beaches and the Chesapeake Bay.

That's a controversial position? Protecting Maryland's coastline? Really? If so, Mr. Hogan may have to take the state's Congressional delegation to the woodshed, too, as both U.S. senators [oppose Mid-Atlantic coastal drilling](#) as well. It's probably a pretty safe bet that a majority of Maryland residents feel the same way, particularly those who make a living in [Ocean City](#).

Officially, Governor Hogan is neither for nor against the federal government's proposal to lease offshore waters from Virginia to Georgia for oil and gas exploration. His press office says he supports an "all-of-the-above" approach to U.S. energy "as long as those efforts are accomplished in an environmentally safe way."

That's nice as Republican boilerplate energy policy goes, but we're talking about potential oil rigs only miles from Maryland's shores or near the mouth of the Chesapeake — a rather critical habitat for migratory fish and crab

reproduction. Last time we checked, oil spills don't necessarily respect state boundaries, something Florida learned first hand after the BP oil spill off the coast of Louisiana in the Gulf of Mexico five years ago.

The question is not whether Attorney General Frosh should be wary of a similar disaster hurting Maryland. The question is why isn't Mr. Hogan? Maryland stands to not receive one thin dime from the presence of these rigs, not in lease payments and not in jobs or economic activity. Yet the state would be vulnerable if disaster strikes.

Maryland voters didn't elect Mr. Hogan to carry water for President Barack Obama's misguided ocean energy policies. Nor to spout the GOP party line in support of the oil industry. He was elected to stand up for Maryland and Marylanders. In this case, he ought to be concerned most about the huge financial stake this state has in clean beaches and clean water.

Here's the real irony. When Mr. Hogan has resisted environmental initiatives involving the Chesapeake Bay in the past, he has frequently suggested neighboring states ought to do more instead. Too much nitrogen? Talk to Pennsylvania farmers and other polluters. That stormwater remediation fee (aka the "rain tax")? Other states aren't doing it, so why should we?

Yet in this case, Mr. Hogan wants to give a free pass to Virginia at the potential expense of his own state's interests. What's that about? Has he developed a man-crush on Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe (a Democrat, incidentally) who has been pushing for offshore drilling (but has tens of millions of dollars in potential royalties persuading him to do so)? Does Mr. Hogan believe there's zero chance of an oil spill? Even industry advocates don't make that claim.

(Incidentally, the governor on whom Mr. Hogan **actually does have a man-crush**, New Jersey's Chris Christie, **has long opposed** Atlantic oil drilling for fear that it could jeopardize his state's tourism economy.)

We don't blame the governor for finding it a bit annoying that he must deal with a Maryland attorney general who is not in political or policy lock-step with him. The last Republican governor expressed a similar disdain, and both men can lay blame on the state constitution. But of all the issues to spur debate, protecting the Chesapeake Bay and Maryland's self-interests (including economic interests), should be a no-brainer. If Mr. Hogan is smart, he will sit down at his desk today and dash off a letter opposing the **Obama administration's five-year lease plan**. Sadly, he'll have missed the comment period (last Monday was the deadline), but at least he'll have demonstrated to residents of this state that he has their interests at heart.

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/editorial/bs-ed-drilling-20150401-story.html>