

Aiken Standard

July 1, 2014

Editorial: Offshore Drilling Bill Isn't Energy Solution

A U.S. House bill approved last week to open up drilling along South Carolina's coast is thankfully a long-shot, but it's still troubling that Congress is once again considering such a measure.

The bill was supported by nearly all of South Carolina's delegation, including House Rep. Joe Wilson, who represents Aiken County.

However, it was wisely voted down by Republican Mark Sanford of Charleston and Democrat Jim Clyburn of Columbia. It has become a recurring theme that when gas prices go up, members of Congress want to pass bills that sound on the surface like they would lessen the pain at the pump, but ultimately do little.

The bill considered last week – H.R. 4899 – is certainly of the same ilk.

Proponents of the bill say that gas prices could be cheaper by expanding oil production and expediting the permitting process, which could be a boon to our economy and even strengthen our national security.

A smart energy bill could certainly accomplish those goals, but the latest by Congress clearly doesn't. There are so many conflicting variables affecting oil prices that it's incredibly short-sighted to cling to the idea of domestic drilling.

We shouldn't have the mentality that if we can just drill off the coast of South Carolina, or the coasts of Virginia or California, that we could pay less at the pump.

In 2008, we often heard the expression "drill baby drill" in order to lower gas prices that were on average \$3.50 to \$4 a gallon. The argument was more production would lead to lower prices, but domestic oil production is booming, and prices haven't gone down.

It's hard for that argument to hold any validity. From 1991 to 2008, domestic production dropped every year, for a total decline of 33 percent.

Since then, however, daily production has risen 49 percent, according to the U.S. Energy Administration.

Even with greater production, we still pay a global price when it comes to oil. Additionally, oil production globally has not dropped. OPEC countries are putting more oil out, and Iraq is still at about 95 percent of its normal oil production even with recent spikes in violence.

With all those factors in our favor, prices are still up about 20 cents at the pump compared to 2013.

This idea of expanded production has been explored through essentially the same legislation since 2011.

Since that time, U.S. oil production has gone from 5.6 million barrels a day to 8.4 million barrels a day.

We hope that lawmakers will come up with a legitimate energy bill sooner rather than later. It's clear that we need to be less dependent on foreign oil.

However, we particularly don't need to risk one of our most precious commodities – South Carolina's coastline.

In Congress, Sanford has said in the past that he believes any decision on exploration should be left up to the individual states, but explained to The Post and Courier in Charleston that "the specter of (operations) offshore doesn't fit with the look or feel our tourists know," he said. Tourism is our state's biggest economic engine, and we shouldn't jeopardize that resource. We don't need the debilitating economic blow that can result from an oil spill.

The bill considered by the House last week doesn't show leadership on energy policies.

The U.S. needs to unlock a smarter energy platform, but offshore shoreline clearly isn't the answer.