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# SOUTH STRAND NEWS

(/)

## Mayor Jack Scoville: Risks of offshore drilling far too high for Georgetown County

By Mayor Jack Scoville

Friday, April 10, 2015



The City of Georgetown, while relatively small in size, has been at the core of economic conversations since the era of rice cultivation. The debate over offshore drilling is no exception.

As mayor, I join my many other coastal colleagues when I say that the risk to our citizens and our coast is not worth the slim possibility of reward.

In Georgetown County, 21 percent of our citizens live below the poverty level and 6.9 percent are unemployed.

Our community needs immediate economic stimulation, something the oil and gas industry cannot offer. The series of procedural steps that must take place before an oil rig can be operational and therefore offer employment opportunities for local residents, is nearly two decades.

The job benefits that the Gulf States enjoy were generations in the making, and still those states rank alongside South Carolina in their levels of poverty.

If the oil industry is able to withstand market changes for 20 years and bring jobs to Georgetown, our citizens will be competing nationally for the most dangerous low-skill, high-return positions. If they succeed, they will join an industry whose employees are seven times more likely to die on the job than the average American worker.

Our only other prospective economic benefit from offshore drilling would be if a refinery and other related processing facilities, like those located in the Louisiana region called "cancer alley" by residents, came to Georgetown.

A refinery would not only ruin our revitalized boardwalk and historic area, it would compromise our health, our tourism and our fishing industry.

Each year, in Georgetown County, some 540,000 tourists put more than \$232 million into our economy. Oil and toxic chemical spills are a regular, not rare, occurrence on offshore rigs. These constant spills pollute the water and would leave their residue on our beaches, marshes and in our rivers and creeks. The beauty of our current coastline would be spoiled, as would our appeal to future residents, retirees, families and the companies that serve them.

Georgetown's identity is undergoing a metamorphosis as our economy grows on our own terms. It is known as a place to find a historic home, a place to eat a gourmet meal, a place where you can graduate from technical college and find a job that pays more than most university graduates make. This

evolution did not happen overnight; nor is the transformation complete, but its progress is in our hands.

If our coast is opened for leasing in 2021, coastal citizens and municipalities will have no hand in the process but to wait.

Wait for economic returns that may never come, wait for the industrialization of the coast to drive off the tourists, and wait for the oil industry to mar the only American coast left untouched by a major oil spill.

Rather than spending the next 30 years waiting, I would like us to spend them exploring and obtaining new opportunities for our city, and building a future of our own choosing. To secure that chance, we must act now and say no to offshore drilling.

(Jack M. Scoville Jr. is mayor of the City of Georgetown.)

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