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Expand offshore oil, gas drilling?: Front Burner

Four years after BP's Deepwater Horizon rig in the Gulf of Mexico exploded, killing 11 workers and spilling more than 200 million gallons of crude, pressure appears to be building for more offshore drilling for oil and natural gas.

In July, over the objections of environmentalists, the Obama administration opened Mid- and South Atlantic waters to seismic testing to help detect undersea oil — a preliminary move toward more offshore drilling.

The American Petroleum Institute, which represents the oil and gas industry, has released studies in recent months estimating the economic impact of allowing oil and gas drilling in three areas that are currently off-limits: the U.S. Pacific Outer Continental Shelf, the Eastern Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf. The studies done for API concluded that drilling in the three areas could create almost 840,000 jobs and generate more than \$200 billion in government revenues.

But the memory of the Deepwater Horizon disaster is still raw for opponents of offshore drilling, including one of today's columnists. He contends the risk of environmental and economic damage from spills far outweighs any possible rewards. Florida, with its huge coastal economy, is especially vulnerable.

Advocates of more offshore drilling, including today's other columnist, insist that safety has improved in the past four years. He argues that the additional supply would enhance U.S. energy security, bring down fuel prices for Americans, and for Florida, make it easier for more tourists to visit.

Read more about it

- An interactive map with state-by-state details on the API studies is at maps.api.org/offshore.
- Progress Florida makes its case against offshore drilling at spillbabyspill.com.
- For facts and figures on U.S. offshore oil and gas production, go online to the U.S. Energy Information Administration at eia.gov and search "offshore drilling."