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1.4 million reasons not to drill

Offshore drilling apologists say the industry is essentially spill free, but the truth is another thing altogether.

For example, a recent Associated Press investigation of an oil leak that has persisted for a decade off the coast of Louisiana, spilling up to 1.4 million gallons of oil, shows that data provided by the government cannot be trusted.

So the question for South Carolina is: Why in the world would anyone support offshore drilling that could well devastate the state's beautiful, healthy coast and the tourism that it depends on?

Gov. Nikki Haley and every member of the S.C. congressional delegation except 6th District Rep. James Clyburn have endorsed the federal government's plan to explore drilling off the state's coast. It's time for them to admit that they have made a mistake.

They should consider the story of the oil leak that occurred in 2005 when Hurricane Ivan's waves triggered an underwater landslide. It toppled Taylor Energy Company's platform and buried 28 wells about 10 miles off Louisiana's coast.

They are still leaking, and they're leaking at a rate that is six times greater than the Coast Guard had estimated and 20 times greater than Taylor's figures — information discovered by the AP in its investigation. The oil slick sheen seen from monitoring flights covers eight square miles.

And it's not the only one. The U.S. Coast Guard's National Response Center reported that Louisiana in 2014 had over 3,000 reported oil spills with volumes ranging up to 11.8 million gallons. It estimates that 25 percent of oil spills are unreported.

Amazingly the government allows Taylor to shield spill-related information from public scrutiny, citing the need to protect trade secrets.

And Taylor is not even sharing information that could help other offshore operators prepare for a similar incident, saying the information is a proprietary asset.

South Carolinians should be wary of reassurances that drilling would not harm the environment. It should also be wary of promises of billions of new dollars and thousands of jobs for the state.

As state Sen. Chip Campsen, R-Charleston, wrote in a recent op-ed on our Commentary page:

"The land-based infrastructure necessary to support offshore drilling ... is not a pretty sight. It is extensive, dirty and highly industrial."

Where would that go on the South Carolina coast?
Clearly coastal South Carolina shouldn't be a sacrificial lamb.

On Thursday, Georgetown became the 50th coastal community to officially oppose offshore oil exploration and development off the East Coast. Mayor Jack Scoville said that “the risk to our citizens and our coast is not worth the slim possibility of reward.”

Surely if offshore drilling would benefit citizens, Mayor Scoville would be supporting it. Twenty-one percent of the city’s residents live below the poverty line.

Other communities standing in opposition include Charleston, Folly Beach, Hilton Head Island, Beaufort, Port Royal, the Isle of Palms, James Island, Sullivan’s Island and Edisto Beach.

Further, 65 members of Congress and more than 160 conservation and animal welfare organizations are against offshore drilling.

Why would all those people oppose something that would benefit them? Because it won’t.