



Offshore oil drilling opposed unanimously by Horry coastal municipalities

It's unanimous now among the municipal governments of coastal Horry County that offshore seismic testing and potentially drilling for oil and natural gas is not wanted. Recently, the town of Briarcliffe Acres, tucked in between the cities of Myrtle Beach and North Myrtle Beach, joined 23 other coastal S.C. communities in opposing offshore oil production.

Town Council member Huston Huffman expressed the united concern: "We understand what damage can ensue from any spill that could happen out there. We don't want to take the risk of a spill out there polluting the beaches." In opposing future offshore oil and natural gas production, coastal S.C. municipal governments are reflecting the thinking of their constituents. Now, elected officials such as U.S. Rep. Tom Rice need to rethink their position, which boils down to go ahead with seismic testing so oil companies know what's out there under the floor of the Atlantic Ocean.

In a comprehensive report by Emily Weaver of The Sun News, Rice outlined his position: "We don't even know what's out there. There appears to be formations that would likely have some type of [crude oil or natural gas] reserves. My position has been let's do the seismic testing; let's find out what's out there and then we can make rational decisions." That position stems from the time when the United States was much more dependent on foreign crude oil. It was prudent to consider federal oil leases off the mid- to south-Atlantic states. Probing for petroleum had not been done for decades and technology has improved. That was the thinking before vast volumes of crude were produced from new sources such as shale.

It was also prior to the monumental Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. The biggest oil spill in U.S. history caused terrific environmental and economic damage along the Gulf Coast. In July, BP (British Petroleum) and five states reached an \$18.7 billion legal settlement. The Deepwater Horizon spill remains very much in the minds of coastal S.C. residents. No matter how far offshore a spill occurs, toxic crude oil will pollute the ocean and eventually the beaches of coastal communities that absolutely depend on tourism. No matter how much the likelihood of oil spills may be reduced, there will be a certain amount of risk that is simply not worth taking. We point out that such risk is not attached to future wind turbines offshore.

Rice is working on rescheduling a public forum, postponed because of record flooding, on the process of testing, potential timelines, environmental concerns and so forth. Rice has visited drilling rigs, including one in offshore Louisiana. He notes that oil companies declined to

develop fields that were recently opened off Alaska. “It may be that this never becomes feasible to drill off the Atlantic [Coast],” he says.

Increased U.S. crude oil production has so improved the nation’s situation that Congress has under consideration authorizing the selling of excess crude to other countries. Earlier this year, oil refiners were running out of storage space. The global price of crude has fallen and that is a factor in oil companies’ reluctance to drill for more oil and gas.

The economic reality is that the U.S. supply of crude oil has greatly diminished any foreseeable need for offshore Atlantic oil production. If the Atlantic has oil and natural gas deposits, they surely can await discovery for a time well into the future – if and when they are needed.

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