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Public's voice blocks drilling



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The democratic process isn't perfect — witness the rise of blowhard Donald Trump in the race for the GOP presidential nomination.

But sometimes democracy works just as it should to express the will of the people. Certainly that's what occurred when the Obama administration decided to abandon plans to open the South Carolina coast to offshore drilling.

Over the past year, the people of coastal South Carolina have spoken nearly as one, through their elected town and county councils, against offshore drilling. Local jurisdictions from Hilton Head to North Myrtle Beach joined the campaign as they independently weighed the risks. Locally, the opposition ranged from Edisto Beach to McClellanville, with virtually every community, large and small, joining in.

And they were backed by all three coastal representatives in the U.S. House. Indeed, two congressmen — 1st District Rep. Mark Sanford and 7th District Rep. Tom Rice, both Republicans — took a stance after considering the local opposition to the plan. In doing so, they joined 6th District Rep. Jim Clyburn, a Democrat.

On Tuesday, officials with the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management also recognized the broad public opposition in South Carolina and other Atlantic coastal states as they cancelled a proposal to allow the exploration for oil and natural gas deposits, preparatory to their extraction.

The federal decision means that the long-standing moratorium on offshore oil drilling along the coasts of South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia and Virginia will continue, despite the best efforts of the oil industry to force a change.

A spokesman for the American Petroleum Institute declared that the administration's decision "appeases extremists who seek to stop oil and natural gas production which would increase the cost of energy for American consumers and close the door for years to creating new jobs, new investments and boosting energy security."

To the contrary, federal officials listened to the unified voice of coastal citizens and their representatives and made their decision accordingly.

If that's surprising to Big Oil, it's only because the industry so often gets its way.

Simply put, coastal communities made a compelling case against opening up the region to offshore drilling.

Tourism is the economic lifeblood of the S.C. coast, and offshore drilling threatens the quality of our beaches and natural resources. Marine life would also be at risk during the exploration process, which uses loud underwater seismic air guns to determine whether natural gas and oil might be present.

Wildlife advocates and environmental organizations and their grass-roots counterparts deserve credit for helping to educate coastal communities about the potential ill-effects of offshore drilling on marine resources.

The campaign against offshore drilling was a wide-ranging, bipartisan effort.

What stands out most is the support given by local elected officials to a public opposing an industry-backed plan that appeared to have every chance of being rubber-stamped by the bureaucracy.

Let's hear it for real representative government.

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