



Our Opinion: No drilling, for now

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Gov. Pat McCrory of North Carolina and U.S. Rep. Mark Sanford of South Carolina, both Republicans, offered very different reactions last week to the Obama administration's decision against opening Atlantic waters to oil and gas exploration.

"President Obama's total reversal can only be described as a special political favor to far-left activists that have no problem importing energy resources from countries hostile to the United States," McCrory said.

"It's a decision that speaks volumes to the importance of voicing one's opinion and local input in the political process," Sanford said. "Residents along our coast should be proud of the way they united on this issue and sent a compelling message to Washington."

McCrory is chairman of the energy industry-affiliated Outer Continental Shelf Governors Coalition, which promotes domestic oil and gas development. He's unhappy that the Obama administration reversed an earlier position that seemed to favor drilling in some waters off the Southeast coast. Was that a political bait-and-switch, as McCrory alleged? Or a response to coastal opposition, as Sanford said?

"When you factor in conflicts with national defense, economic activities such as fishing and tourism, and opposition from many local communities, it simply doesn't make sense to move forward with lease sales in the coming five years," Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said in announcing the decision.

Many coastal towns in South and North Carolina passed resolutions opposing offshore drilling. They expressed concerns about possible oil spills and the onshore infrastructure that could industrialize previously charming beach communities. Fears may be overblown, but not much was done to allay them other than to promise economic development and jobs. Tourism and fishing already sustain the coastal economy, however. Displacing any of that with a new and more disruptive industry was unappealing to many.

Given current conditions — a global oil glut and low prices — there's not much of a push for exploration, anyway. Yet, the administration indicated it will grant additional leases in the oil-

rich Gulf of Mexico. Oil companies may prefer to drill new wells where they already have infrastructure when it makes economic sense to proceed.

Two other points: First, the Obama administration will leave office in 10 months. The next president can reopen the issue. Second, any deposits of oil and natural gas off the North Carolina coast aren't going anywhere. They can be extracted at a future time when conditions are right — and perhaps more safely than could be done today.

In the meantime, McCrory might take a cue from Sanford and acknowledge the legitimate concerns along the coast. People who live in those communities aren't "far-left activists." They're small business owners, fishermen and ordinary folks who choose to live on or near the beach for its beauty and serenity. Their views should count as much as those from within the oil industry.

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