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‘No drilling’ voices grow

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This April 27, 2010 file photo shows an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico near the Chandeleur Islands, off the Southeastern tip of Louisiana. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert, File)

The number of municipalities in South and North Carolina that are voting to oppose offshore drilling continues to grow. Wilmington, N.C., is the most recent.

Unfortunately, the misguided enthusiasm for drilling is also continuing among state leaders. Many advocates live far from the coastal areas that would bear the brunt of its impact.

By their votes, more than two dozen communities have said that the possibility that drilling would bring jobs and boost the economy is not worth the risk of widespread damage to coastal areas.

They are not comforted that technology has improved. The fact is that drilling and transporting oil through pipelines across the ocean floor can — and does — still lead to leaks and spills.

The use of seismic waves to locate and measure stores of oil can — and has — distressed and disoriented whales and other marine life.

The enormous pipelines and supporting industrial infrastructure on precious coastal land would be an ugly visual scar.

And the jobs that the industry promises will materialize require special skills and are likely to be filled by people who live elsewhere.

So far, South Carolina's Gov. Nikki Haley, Sen. Tim Scott and Sen. Lindsey Graham, and North Carolina's Gov. Pat McCrory are buying the industry's rosy predictions. They should be calculating the environmental, economic and social damage that offshore drilling could bring.

Both Carolinas rely on fishing and tourism dollars — most of which come from beach areas.

And one of the most appealing features of the South Carolina Lowcountry — a feature that has enticed many people and businesses to move here — is its natural beauty.

Industry apologists say that the number of oil spills by offshore operators has decreased dramatically.

But the number of spills that occur as oil is transported is significant.

In 2005, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita destroyed 113 oil drilling platforms in the Gulf of Mexico. That's well worth noting in North and South Carolina where the memory of Hugo and other hurricanes still lingers.

At least 17 South Carolina communities are standing against offshore seismic testing. Among them are Charleston, Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, Columbia and six Charleston area beach communities — the Isle of Palms, Sullivan's Island, Folly Beach, Edisto Beach, Kiawah Island and Seabrook Island.

In addition to Wilmington, North Carolina communities on the list include Wrightsville, Carolina and Topsail beaches. They are among more than 50 communities in the South Atlantic coast region that have opposed it.

South Carolina leaders have consistently fought legalizing casino gambling. Offshore drilling is a huge gamble that could cost our state financially and environmentally. Our leaders should resist the urge to gamble with the state's well-being.

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