

September 3, 2014

## **Offshore drilling not worth risks**

Offshore drilling is being sold as the prospect of thousands of new jobs and billions of dollars of revenue for South Carolina.

And presumably that's why many of the state's political leaders and residents favor exploration for offshore oil and gas resources off the state's coast.

But the outlook isn't necessarily so rosy for the coastal region. The state should pay heed to the Lowcountry perspective of leaders like Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling, who pointed out some of the flaws in the coastal drilling plan in comments to the Greenville News.

"I think it is a huge threat without a whole lot of justification," Mayor Keyserling said. "What is the impact to tourism of oil rigs? What is the impact on tourism of an accident?"

And, we'd add, what is the potential impact on the coastal environment?

Mayor Keyserling is just one of a number of elected Lowcountry officials, including Charleston Mayor Joe Riley and 1st District Rep. Mark Sanford, who have expressed opposition to the drilling scheme being advanced by federal regulators.

Oil industry estimates of jobs and investment are understandably generating some support among South Carolinians - particularly those who don't live along the coast. The American Petroleum Institute, for example, estimates that the oil industry in South Carolina could create 11,000 jobs and generate as much as \$3.7 billion in state revenue over a 20-year period.

Even if there are significant oil and gas reserves beneath the South Carolina coast, drilling offshore directly threatens a proven industry - tourism - that already generates billions of dollars for the state and employs about one out of every ten residents, according to the S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism.

Even under the strictest possible safety standards, serious risks remain both from large-scale spills like the Gulf Horizon disaster and from the natural leaks that occur on a daily basis. And pipelines, tankers and other oil infrastructure could easily become eyesores and threaten fragile coastal ecosystems.

Those risks outweigh the projected benefits for South Carolina and its residents.

Energy independence is important, and strides have been made by a combination of decreased consumption and increased domestic production to reduce the nation's reliance on foreign imports. Natural gas production, in particular, has sharply risen.

But there are better ways to boost domestic energy production than drilling off the Atlantic Coast. The Obama administration could ease up its opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline, for starters.

South Carolina needs to attract new jobs and revenue, but it would be shortsighted to risk the tourism industry with its demonstrated ability to employ tens of thousands and generate billions of dollars for one with no track record in South Carolina and a spotty record elsewhere.

Lowcountry leaders are right to oppose off-shore drilling, despite the blandishments of the industry and its advocates, including elected officials in Columbia and Washington, D.C.

The state depends on the tourism industry, and coastal tourism leads the way. It would be foolhardy to risk our most valuable resources in the process of seeking out an incompatible and troublesome industry.