

Editorial: DeSantis, Scott send mixed messages on oil drilling



CHRIS URSO | Times Florida Republican candidate for governor Ron DeSantis says he will fight to prevent oil drilling off Florida's coast, but his spokesman won't say whether DeSantis would support a permanent ban.



Published September 24 2018

Updated September 25 2018

Every candidate for federal and state office in Florida should be unequivocal in opposing oil drilling off the coast and crystal clear in supporting a permanent extension to the federal ban on drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico. But the Republican candidates for governor and U.S. Senate are offering superficial opposition to drilling without taking specific positions, and voters should see that hedging as a warning sign this November.

Gubernatorial nominee Ron DeSantis and Gov. Rick Scott, who's seeking to unseat Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson, are both trying to shore up their dismal environmental records. The outbreak of Red Tide, algae blooms in South Florida and a resurgent effort by oil and gas companies to open the door for new drilling in the gulf have put the environment front-and-center as a campaign issue. But neither Republican has made clear that offshore drilling has no place in Florida's future or embraced extending the drilling moratorium that only lasts until 2022. Their reluctance to commit should concern voters, who deserve straight talk on allowing drilling that would threaten Florida's environment and economy.

Politico's Bruce Ritchie reported Monday that DeSantis' Democratic opponent, Tallahassee Mayor Andrew Gillum, supports a permanent ban on drilling off Florida's coast. But the report also says a DeSantis' campaign spokesman wouldn't say whether the Republican would support a permanent ban or support maintaining the ban in the area now under the drilling moratorium. That is a big red flag. DeSantis' environmental platform lists fighting oil drilling as a priority, cites his "proven track record" and says he will rely on his close ties to the Trump administration "to ensure that oil drilling never occurs off Florida's coastlines." So does never mean only last until the moratorium expires, or would a ban apply only in waters closer to the coast than the current line?

Under a bipartisan congressional deal reached in 2006 that was pushed by Nelson and signed into law by President George W. Bush, drilling is barred within 235 miles of Tampa Bay and 125 miles from the Panhandle until June 2022. The areas off-limits include a wide swath the U.S. Navy and Air Force use for military training missions.

While proposals to drill off Florida cooled in the wake of the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig disaster in 2010, the industry has renewed its push at the state and federal levels to reauthorize expanded exploration and drilling. President Donald Trump has proposed expanded offshore drilling, including off the Florida coast. In what was widely seen as a plug for Scott's Senate campaign, U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke declared earlier this year that Florida was

"off the table" for new drilling. But Zinke later acknowledged that Florida still is being included in the federal planning process. Scott has shown support for the current moratorium, but he has sent muddled messages about extending the ban or for making the moratorium permanent. During his first campaign for governor in 2010, Scott called for drilling offshore. After the BP disaster, he massaged his position, calling for drilling to be done in an "environmentally sound way and adhering to the strictest of safety standards."

Nelson, who has proposed legislation to extend the ban until 2027 and to make the moratorium permanent, has been clear and consistent that drilling is a threat to Florida's way of life. Leaving wiggle room on drilling will only open a door for lawmakers to compromise, say, for allowing rigs up to 75 miles from the Gulf coast, or for repealing areas currently under moratorium. And it opens a window to revisionist history. Former Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp, who is leading a group seeking to open the eastern gulf to oil exploration, caused a furor in August when he falsely claimed that oil from the Deepwater disaster "didn't even reach the shores of Florida."

Want more stories like this? Sign up for our Day Starter Newsletter

Today's top headlines and information delivered to your inbox every morning.

You might also like: [News at Noon](#)

[SIGN UP](#)

All candidates for statewide office, Congress and the Florida Legislature should be clear that drilling's inherent dangers outweigh any benefit to Florida. Candidates need to present a bipartisan united front to Washington - or at least be honest enough with voters before election to admit they have kept the door open for drilling even as they claim to be advocates for the environment.

TRENDING NOW

Ads by Revcontent

This is the Real Reason 'Bewitched' Was Cancelled!

Routinejournal

Ronda Rousey's Mini Dress Caused a Stir on the Red Carpet

Reportily

Washington, District of Columbia: Unknown Company is Disrupting a \$200 Billion Dollar Industry

EverQuote

District of Columbia Will Pay You to Install Solar if You Live in Washington

Energybillcruncher

Robin Williams' Final Net Worth Brought His Family to Tears

Reportily

The Real Reason Air Force One is Painted Blue Will Give You Chills

Reportily