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Oil drilling plan poses uncertainty, risks

By: Kevin Griffin

A recent convergence of factors has increased the likelihood that North Carolina may see offshore drilling within the next decade or so.

North Carolina Senators Thom Tillis and Richard Burr added an amendment to the recently passed, though unsigned, Keystone XL pipeline that would allow for leasing of drilling sites in the Atlantic, according to WRAL.

The Obama administration also came out with a proposal to auction leases off the Atlantic Coast beginning in 2021, according to WRAL. The proposal will involve research into what the effects of drilling would be if leases were auctioned off, and a 50-mile buffer from the coast would be established for the drilling sites.

Often, the prospect of oil drilling is synonymous with economic growth and energy independence. Tillis and Burr cite an industry study saying the state may gain up to 55,000 new jobs and bring in \$4 billion between 2017 and 2035, according to WRAL.

Gov. Pat McCrory echoed the sentiment that drilling would make North Carolina an energy leader and further the goal of American energy independence, according to WRAL.

Despite the optimistic tone of proponents, there is doubt about how much benefit drilling would actually bring to the state and the region.

One important factor is that we are unsure how much oil there is in these areas. Vox reported the number of estimated oil reserves in the Atlantic are far less than for other already approved drilling areas.

The potential for environmental and economic consequences for the East Coast are also valid concerns. From a broad perspective, however, the biggest problem this approach shows is a commitment to an established mode of energy production at the expense of much-needed advances in alternative energy.

Proponents of offshore drilling are speaking as though this were an enormously innovative undertaking. However, given the present and future challenges associated with climate change, the truly innovative actions we should undertake involve moving away from fossil fuels.

Instead of oil as the only option, we should branch out and try to develop alternatives.

Information from the environmental advocacy group Oceana suggested offshore wind energy could create more state jobs than drilling.

The primary takeaway is that we should all be skeptical about the drilling proposal. There are environmental risks associated with drilling, and we are not certain what the economic impact will be. Above all else, it only furthers the status quo in energy policy that we need to get away from.