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Rising voices against drilling

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Every coastal municipality in South Carolina has said “No.” So have Congressmen Mark Sanford, Jim Clyburn and Tom Rice, who represent all of the coastal districts in South Carolina. And so has Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster.

Now more than 400 business leaders throughout South Carolina have joined the already significant ranks opposing offshore oil and gas drilling along the state’s coast.

Those business owners and associations, in an effort led by Don’t Drill Lowcountry, a non-profit organization opposing offshore drilling in the Atlantic, have sent a letter to Gov. Nikki Haley asking that she withdraw the state from federal plans that would open up vast swaths of Atlantic waters to drilling.

Offshore oil and gas “jeopardizes the advantages that our businesses have, including a steady stream of tourists, and new residents and businesses that come here for South Carolina’s beauty and high quality of life,” the business group says.

It also points out that Gov. Haley has worked successfully to bring innovative businesses to the state and acknowledges that South Carolina’s high quality of life is an economic driver. Offshore drilling, however, could threaten those gains. “Risking this forward momentum ... is simply a step backward for our state.”

If anything, that’s an understatement. There is simply no reasonable justification for exposing the S.C. coastline to the well-documented risks entailed in finding, extracting and transporting offshore oil.

And any economic benefits the oil industry could provide the state are far outweighed by the existing economic impact of tourism, fishing and other businesses that depend on a clean, healthy coastline to thrive.

Coastal tourism alone generates billions of dollars in annual impact and employs tens of thousands of South Carolinians.

So far, Gov. Haley has remained in support of offshore drilling. In September, she called it “critical” to the state’s future.

But if the voices of mayors, council members and other leaders representing more than a million South Carolinians aren't enough to dissuade Gov. Haley from supporting a plan that could be disastrous for the state's coastal communities, perhaps the voices of business leaders can make a difference.

Each additional voice that says "No" to this risky, unnecessary plan should make it tougher for the governor to maintain a position that would satisfy the oil industry but not her own constituents. The same should be the case for those members of the state's congressional delegation who continue the ill-advised support of offshore drilling.

Maybe they have lost touch with their state.

After all, they are elected to serve South Carolina — and an increasing number of South Carolinians are emphatically saying "No" to offshore oil.

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