



Don't revive plan for offshore drilling

By The Herald Editorial Board

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President-elect Donald Trump seems likely to take up the battle cry, “Drill, baby, drill!” We hope that doesn’t include a new push to allow offshore drilling for oil and gas along the Atlantic coastline.

Candidate Trump campaigned on the issue of oil independence during the presidential campaign, saying that, if elected, he would open federal lands and offshore areas to energy exploration. And observers say he is likely to make good on the pledge for more aggressive drilling.

Among candidates interviewed for the key cabinet post of energy secretary were Oklahoma oil billionaire Harold Hamm and drilling proponent U.S. Rep. Kevin Cramer of North Dakota.

In 2010, President Barack Obama’s administration released a report touting the possibility of opening offshore Virginia to oil and gas exploration. The report also said leases along other parts of the southeast Atlantic coast, including South Carolina, were possible.

But after considerable opposition to the plan, the administration announced in March that it would reverse any plans to allow drilling along the Atlantic coast. That reversal was a triumph of the democratic process and the power of public opinion.

The issue of offshore drilling on the Southeast coastline is more than just a battle between environmentalists and Big Oil. The effort to retain the ban on offshore drilling was joined by a coalition of business groups, sportsmen, local chambers of commerce and officials with the tourism industry up and down the coast.

Residents in every state within the proposed drilling area organized grassroots groups to fight the plan. But the response from South Carolina was exceptionally vocal.

Every coastal city council in the state passed a resolution against the plan. And much of the opposition was based not simply on environmental issues but also economic concerns.

U.S. Rep. Mark Sanford, R-S.C., who opposed offshore drilling as governor, remains an opponent of Atlantic drilling. He said his opposition reflects his support of the conservative value of local control, including natural resources.

Opponents are well aware that South Carolina relies heavily on the tourist industry. Offshore drilling is a direct threat to the state's beaches and wildlife habitats that are the backbone of a tourist industry that attracts millions of visitors to the state each year.

Those who rely on the Atlantic fisheries – both sportsmen and professional trawlers – also are strongly opposed to any plan to drill off the coast. They fear another accident like the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which killed untold thousands of fish, destroyed habitat and hampered commercial fishing for years.

Even the Pentagon has officially protested any plan to drill offshore, saying it could interfere with military maneuvers and missile tests.

Finally, offshore drilling is not likely to be the revenue and job producer supporters claim. Drilling in the deep waters of the Atlantic is expensive at a time when a barrel of oil is going for less than \$50, with prices potentially dropping unless OPEC reduces production in the months ahead.

With the potential of a major spill, South Carolina's precious natural resources hang in the balance. If Trump is the businessman he claims to be, he should recognize that offshore drilling is not worth the risk.

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