

## Editorial: Adoration for offshore drilling suggests need for a reality check



(AP Photo/Chris Carlson)

Offshore drilling seems to have the approval of Virginia politicians and the majority of the state's residents.

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BY THE EDITORIAL PAGE STAFF OF THE FREE LANCE-STAR

President Obama's decision to allow offshore drilling in the Atlantic Ocean along the Outer Continental Shelf from Virginia to Florida has been described as part of his “all of the above” approach to domestic energy production.

Perhaps America's energy agenda might be better described as “all of the below,” given the headlong rush to extract oil and natural gas from underground sources through drilling and fracking.

With the president giving his nod to offshore drilling—along with Interior Secretary Sally Jewell calling it part of a “balanced approach to oil and gas development,” and state leaders such Gov. Terry McAuliffe and Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine supporting the idea, and Hampton Roads mayors salivating over the job prospects, and even the majority of polled Virginians saying “drill, baby, drill”—momentum would appear to be squarely in drilling's favor.

It will be up to environmentalists to rise above the din with an alternative point of view—or at least a commitment to demanding cautionary measures and oversight.

Increasing U.S. oil production is contributing mightily to the global oil glut that has slashed gasoline prices in recent months. Natural gas, a cleaner alternative to coal for power plants and cheaper choice for residential consumers, has seen rising domestic production as well.

But none of that appears to be slowing the United States' ongoing push for energy independence, for the good of the economy and national security.

But there are other issues at work here that demand our attention. The first is that as long as fossil fuels remain plentiful and cheap, with supplies fortified by domestic drilling, fracking and coal mining, the development and broader use of alternative forms such as wind and solar will remain financially disincentivized.

It is unfortunate that the president would lump together all energy sources and initiatives when the future of the planet depends on alternative fuels rising in importance above the rest. The irony of oil drilling off a coast experiencing rising sea levels due to human consumption of fossil fuels is unavoidable.

Second is the apparent contented acceptance of the immediate threats posed by our obsession with pulling oil out of the Earth. From the 1969 Santa Barbara spill in the Pacific to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill off the Gulf of Mexico coast, the dangers of offshore drilling are well-documented.

Though the controversial prospect of fracking in eastern central Virginia's Taylorsville basin remains unresolved, the environmental toll presented by the practice becomes clearer every day. Pennsylvania is reporting near-daily violations associated with fracking in the Marcellus basin. North Dakota farmland is contaminated by 3 million gallons of spilled saltwater used for fracking. And in Oklahoma, the 567 magnitude 3 or larger earthquakes reported last year are being blamed on drilling practices by the oil and gas industry.

So while momentum builds for drilling off the coast of Virginia, the least we can do for ourselves and future generations is to impose fail-safe environmental protections—and in the meantime give our energy priorities a serious and thorough reality check.

[http://www.fredericksburg.com/opinion/editorials/adoration-for-offshore-drilling-suggests-need-for-a-reality-check/article\\_e84df286-26e5-50b2-b925-f1d9750e6df3.html](http://www.fredericksburg.com/opinion/editorials/adoration-for-offshore-drilling-suggests-need-for-a-reality-check/article_e84df286-26e5-50b2-b925-f1d9750e6df3.html)