

the Sumter ITEM

Stop offshore drilling in the Atlantic now

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This is for everyone who loves the beaches of South Carolina, who has grown up swimming and boating in our oceans and creeks, and has watched the tides change from Hilton Head to North Myrtle Beach.

You owe it to yourself, your children, their children and anyone else down the generational line to become extremely familiar with the offshore drilling freight train that is rolling toward South Carolina.

I met a woman named Peg Howell on Tuesday at the Georgetown Rotary Club, and you should meet her too.

She's a remarkable person who spent her college summers working on oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. She later became Chevron USA's first female "company man" as a rig supervisor in the Gulf. That's right. A female rig supervisor.

She's a scientist with a bachelor's degree in Petroleum Engineering who has worked as a Petroleum Engineer, Production Engineer and Drilling Engineer on oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico and the North Sea. To top it off, she earned a Harvard MBA and became an Assistant Dean at Harvard Business School.

She's an active outdoor enthusiast who now lives in North Litchfield Beach with her husband, John Thomas, a Georgetown County Councilman. He's a former Naval Intelligence Officer who retired as a Commander. These are smart people who care about South Carolina and now call it home.

Peg is exactly the sort of person oil companies and the politicians who take their endless supply of money don't want you to hear from because she's telling the unfiltered, ugly truth about the long-term implications of the bad decisions we're headed toward making.

I've read about her recently in the Coastal Observer and The Georgetown Times, but it was hearing her speak in person about the realities of offshore drilling that got my attention.

To learn more, start with the website - "Stop Offshore Drilling in the Atlantic" - www.sodapopsc.com. One of the most important pages to read on the site is "A Brief History," found here: <http://bit.ly/1INgyEC>.

Take special note of this paragraph: "Our elected officials have been misled by the American Petroleum Institute, the lobbying arm for the oil and gas industry, who says the oil business will bring tens of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in revenue to S.C. However, the revenues belong to the U.S. Treasury, not the states, and the jobs will be filled by expert and experienced oil field workers from the Gulf coast, not from S.C.

If you follow the money, it doesn't take much to see how the \$10s of thousands of campaign money supplied to our elected officials by oil companies must be clouding their judgment."

This is exactly the type of secretive, fast-track political influence and corruption that makes my blood boil.

More than 35 years ago we began writing in these same pages about how the SCA Services/GSX/Safety Kleen/Laidlaw/Kestrel Horizons toxic waste landfill on the shores of Lake Marion got started under the guise of a kitty litter mining operation, and how most state politicians and the Department of Health and Environmental leadership turned their heads and allowed it to grow into the mess it is today. South Carolina has been left holding a toxic time bomb, and the dumpers are long gone with their profits.

When people in power aren't held accountable early on, bad things happen in the long term. When people don't speak out forcefully, we get what we deserve. Newspapers can't do it alone, and this offshore drilling mess is a perfect example.

I don't want future generations to watch oil wash up on the beaches of Litchfield and Pawleys, or witness the devastation of the Murrells Inlet ecosystem because of something that happened here when I was an adult who could speak out against it. You shouldn't either.

Try out www.govtrack.us for contacting the national politicians, and www.sc.gov for the state politicians, starting with Gov. Nikki Haley, who opened the door to it all along with some other Southern governors. Tell them "No to offshore drilling in the Atlantic."

More on this topic in coming weeks, including the false claims oil company advocates are making about potential job creation in S.C.; the twisted logic of endangering S.C.'s constantly growing and thriving tourism industry for oil exploration efforts; the likelihood of another BP Deepwater Horizon-style accident; hurricane aftermath in the oil towns of Louisiana, and the oil companies' real long-term plans for those Atlantic rigs they want to put off our coast.

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