

News Flash



Small Bites, Big Issue: The Florida League on Coastal Drilling, Part 1 of 2

The Big Beach Grab?

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Perspectives from the League of Women Voters of Florida

The Florida League of Women Voters believes that Floridians must take note of the environmental risks versus the potential monetary gain when considering offshore drilling.

Florida's greatest assets are its emerald waters, its sugar-white sand, its gorgeous beaches. Oil spills DO occur, such as the huge one now in the Timor Sea off Australia. Hurricanes mean our state is particularly vulnerable to this kind of catastrophe. Couple those risks with the fact that past drilling efforts have yielded NO results, and I believe **Florida citizens need to really question** the Legislature's sudden interest in selling the rights to drill for oil off our beautiful shores.



Look no farther than the coast of west Florida for the world's finest beaches. So says the renowned "Dr. Beach," Stephen P. Leatherman, Professor and Director of the Laboratory for Coastal Research at Florida International University. "The Panhandle beaches are the finest, whitest sand beaches in the country — probably the world: That's one of the reasons our west coast beaches win award after award and draw millions of visitors."

The facts:

- Florida's tourism industry is responsible for 20 percent of the state's economy, with its tourists spending nearly \$65 billion dollars, and creating 964,000 jobs. In addition, more than \$800 million worth of commercial fish are caught annually and more than \$5.6 billion is spent in annual recreational fishing expenditures. **Why put the tourism industry in jeopardy**, especially given the precarious economy, for dubious potential profits? Not to mention our west coast citizens' quality of life?
- Rep. Dean Cannon of Winter Park, incoming Speaker of the Florida House, says there's **money** for Florida to be made by drilling for oil off our shores. His supporters stated last spring that bringing drilling to Florida's coasts would annually net the state \$1.6 billion in royalties and taxes. But wasn't it just 2005 when then-Governor Jeb Bush authorized the payment of \$12.5 million of Florida's hard earned tax dollars to buy out the oil companies' contracts after years of finding **nothing** off Florida's coasts?

Gov Bush said at that time, "Taxpayers are protected from hundreds of millions of dollars in takings claims while Florida's waters and beaches are safeguarded from the threat of coastal drilling."

- The risks? Dave Mica of the Florida Petroleum Council said environmental risks are minimal with modern technology. "You just don't have oil spills with oil production and exploration," he said. ``The entire ethic of the industry has changed."

But wait, **oil spills do happen**, and fairly often in fact. Right now, the **very technology** they are touting as safe has sprung a massive leak in Australia. As of a week ago, reports say it may take 50 days to stop an oil and gas leak off northwest Australia as marine authorities fight to prevent the slick from harming migratory whales and breeding turtles. The leak in the Timor Sea has caused a 19 mile light-oil slick off the Kimberley, one of the world's last true wilderness areas. It is the third largest leak in Australia's history.

And, **right here in America, during 2008, the Coast Guard National Response Center logged more than 33,000 spills**. Pipelines and platforms each accounted for more than 1,300, and storage tanks more than 2,400. In 2005, Hurricanes Rita and Katrina caused 124 oil spills, destroyed 115 drilling rigs and petroleum production platforms and over 457 pipelines in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Remember: Florida is ranked #1 in the nation for hurricanes!

- Another redlight is endangering the **federal regulations** protecting our coasts. If the Legislature were to vote to open up drilling in state waters 10 miles from the shore, it will likely crumble the Federal protections that both Republican and Democratic Members of Congress have fought for during the past decades.

CONCLUSION: Florida is strapped for taxes. But opening up our coasts for doubtful dollars, and creating a risk to our tourism economy, should make citizens ask: Why would we risk this? And would those funds relieve hard-pressed Florida taxpayers, or would the real money merely fill the campaign chests of elected officials who are cheerleaders for the oil industry? Already the lobbyists are arriving, 29 already, and the campaign cash is flowing.

The State of Florida does not have an income tax because of our tourism industry. Damage those pristine, white-sand beaches and beautiful fishing waters, and we'll need to replace the lost revenue with more taxes.

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News Flash



FL League of Women Voters: Following the Money on Coastal Drilling

Florida League of Women Voters

Small Bites, Big Issue: Coastal Drilling Part 2 of 2

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Perspectives from the League of Women Voters of Florida

Do you remember Coastal Petroleum? There are not-so-ancient-history lessons from the Coastal Petroleum dispute four years ago that should not be forgotten. For twenty-five years the company had explored for oil just off our coast and found nothing. In 2005, Gov. Jeb Bush and members of the Cabinet proclaimed victory for Florida when they agreed to pay Coastal Petroleum Co. \$12.5 million to abandon its leases for oil drilling off the Gulf of Mexico.



"This landmark settlement agreement eliminates the potential for drilling activities in state waters under lease -- without the prospect of protracted and unpredictable courtroom battles," then-Governor Jeb Bush said in a statement after the Cabinet meeting. "Taxpayers are protected from hundreds of millions of dollars in takings claims while Florida's waters and beaches are safeguarded from the threat of coastal drilling."

It all started back in 1944, when Governor Holland and his Cabinet signed a renewable oil lease agreement covering 3.6 million acres of state submerged lands stretching 10.36 miles out into the Gulf of Mexico. The lease extended from Franklin County on the Florida Panhandle to Pasco County north of Tampa. Coastal Petroleum purchased the company that that owned the rights and drilled for oil for years without producing any commercial quantity of oil.

Coastal Petroleum's drilling operations ended in the 1970s with a series of dry holes, according to legal documents. But with a state ban on oil drilling approved in 1990, Coastal filed suit against Florida saying that the ban constituted a taking of its royalty and leasing interests.

Coastal and Florida battled it out in court, and when the Cabinet agreed in 2005 to pay \$12.5 million for the leases, Gov. Jeb Bush praised the resolution as "incredible." Then-Attorney General Charlie Crist and other Cabinet members voted in favor.

Rep. Dean Cannon, incoming Speaker of the Florida House, believes drilling is a good idea, and introduced a surprise bill last Spring to lift the state's decades-old drilling ban, giving the Governor and Cabinet authority to approve new drilling lease proposals. His supporters stated last spring that bringing drilling to Florida's coasts would annually net the state \$1.6 billion in royalties and taxes.

Governor Crist now says he supports offshore drilling if the coast can be protected -- but he hasn't endorsed any proposal that shows how that can be done. He opposed a House bill earlier this year that would have allowed drilling within three miles of the coast, but he has said he supports taking up the

drilling issue again in a special session this fall.

But, just last month, in a letter sent to officials at the U.S. Department of the Interior, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration urged a drastic reduction in off shore drilling plans for large tracts of the Alaska coast, Atlantic seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico citing threats to marine life and potentially devastating effects of oil spills. (Tribune News Release, Oct. 13, 2009)

CONCLUSION:

It's no accident oil drilling has become an issue this year. With the economic recession, lawmakers are looking to any revenue source to make up the budget deficit without raising taxes. Proponents of renewed drilling efforts believe there is money to be made for the state in leasing out the rights to our coast. However, the League believes those potential profits are dubious at best. Instead, tax reform offers immediate relief without risk to our beaches and our tourism dollars.

Think of this, in all the time Coastal Petroleum drilled, the state only got \$2.66 million in revenues. With the \$12.5 million buyout, the state is already close to \$10 million down. But above and beyond the merits of drilling or not, the lobbying efforts of big-spending Big Oil would take over our elections process, reduce the voice of the voter, and restrict our choices in the governance of our state. To assist citizens in following the money, we call on the Legislature to disclose the sources behind all contributions to individuals and groups.

For further reading, we've compiled some articles on this issue from across the state:

[Well "Oiled" Effort to Open Drilling ...](#)

BY MARY ELLEN KLAS, MIAMI HERALD

[Politicians Slimy Enough Without Big Oil's Slick Talk by Scott Maxwell](#)

BY SCOTT MAXWELL, ORLANDO SENTINEL

[Energy Associates Push For Coastal Drilling](#)

BY CRAIG PITTMAN, ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

[Who's Behind the Push for Drilling?](#)

BY CRAIG PITTMAN, ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

[The Braslow Report: History of Coastal Drilling in Florida](#)

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Read more about the League's research and positions here: www.TheFloridaVoter.org

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