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## Trump's Offshore Drilling Plan



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It was offshore oil drilling deja vu for me—having broken the story about the oil industry seeking to drill in the offshore Atlantic nearly 50 years ago.

But this time offshore drilling would be completely unnecessary with the U.S. awash in petroleum (thus \$2.50-a-gallon gas) and oil drilling in the sea ten times more costly than drilling on land. Plus, renewable energy, led by solar and wind, is now well-developed and cheaper than fossil fuels.

And although in 1970, the spill in 1969 from an oil-drilling platform off Santa Barbara, California that blackened miles of coastline and killed birds, fish and marine mammals had just demonstrated the environmental dangers of offshore oil drilling, just eight years ago the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion and consequent oil spill disaster in 2010 was even worse, blackening the coasts of several states along the Gulf of Mexico with oil and killing marine life on an even more massive scale. It was the biggest offshore oil spill ever.

Meanwhile, global warming—mainly caused by burning of fossil fuels notably oil—has shown in recent years the danger of continuing to use oil. Another difference: this time partisan politics has become part of the process.

But there I was as the new year began vacationing at an inn in Key West, Florida. This was among the areas I traveled to after, in 1970, at the daily Long Island Press, exposing the oil industry's Atlantic offshore drilling plans. I picked up The Key West Citizen and read about the Trump administration giving a blanket go-ahead to oil drilling off virtually every U.S. coast.

The arguments against it in The Key West Citizen were similar to those made in the Keys and up and down the Atlantic Coast nearly 50 years ago—that drilling would threaten marine life and a “robust tourist-based economy which generates \$2 billion alone in water-based activities,” as the newspaper noted.” Florida Senator Bill Nelson was quoted as calling the Trump administration plan “an assault on Florida’s economy, our national security, the will of the public and the environment. This proposal defies all common sense.”

Back decades ago in traveling the Atlantic coast investigating the, I visited the first offshore drill rig set up in the Atlantic, off Nova Scotia. The dangers of drilling were obvious. On the rig it was admitted by the executive from Shell Canada that the booms promoted in oil industry ads as containing spills “just don’t work in over five-foot seas.” Peat moss was being stockpiled along the Nova Scotia coast to try to sop up spilled oil. On Long Island, “you’d use straw,” the Shell Canada man said. A rescue boat circled the rig 24 hours a day.

But a succession of moratoria voted in overwhelmingly by Congress caused drilling off the U.S. Atlantic coast to largely fade away.

Now the Trump administration had thrown the door to offshore oil drilling door completely open—for drilling not only on the Atlantic coast but on the Pacific coast, too, and in Arctic waters.

Returning home to Long Island from Florida, I read the strong protests in this area to the move. DuWayne Gregory, presiding officer of the Suffolk County Legislature, said the Trump offshore oil-drilling plan “would be devastating to our coastal communities on Long Island by damaging marine life and precious natural resources, increasing the chances for a catastrophic spill.” Members of the Suffolk Legislature in a letter to U.S. Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke, noted that “the proposed program would promote oil and gas drilling on more than 98 percent of the Outer Continental Shelf, including a region that encompasses the entirety of Suffolk County...This program will cause substantial harm to our county’s tourism revenue...as well as our precious marine resources.”

“Our beautiful coastline is crucial to this state’s economy,” declared New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. It “generates billions of dollars through tourism, fishing and other industries.”

Both Cuomo and the Suffolk County legislators cited a sudden deal between Zinke and Florida Governor Rick Scott exempting Florida from the drilling scheme, and asked for an exemption, too.

That deal, it has been widely reported, has to do with the Trump administration wanting to help Republican Scott in a run for the U.S. Senate, challenging Nelson, a Democrat. At least when I got into the issue in 1970, with Richard Nixon as president, politics had nothing to do with his administration’s decisions about where drilling should take place—this would be an “equal opportunity” environmental threat.

In the many protests to the Trump plan, the Zinke-Scott deal has also been cited.

This Monday, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper—who joined with the governors of six other Atlantic states last week in a letter to Zinke asking that Trump administration offshore drilling plan be reconsidered—said North Carolina would sue the federal government if’s not, and that the Florida exemption would be part of the litigation. Cooper pointed out that Zinke in granting the exemption spoke of concern because Florida is “heavily reliant on tourism as an economic driver.” Said Cooper: “If that’s the reason to exempt Florida, then it’s the reason to exempt North Carolina.”

But then, on Tuesday it was reported that this past Friday in Washington, Walter Cruickshank, acting director of the Interior Department’s Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, told a subcommittee of the House Committee on Natural Resources that the Florida exemption was “not final.”

I originally got into the offshore oil drilling story with a tip from a fisherman out of Montauk, Long Island who said he had seen in the ocean east of Montauk, a major

Atlantic Coast fishing port, the same sort of vessel as the boats he observed searching for petroleum when he was a shrimper in the Gulf of Mexico.

I telephoned oil company after company with each saying they were not involved in searching for oil in the Atlantic. Then there was a call from a PR guy at Gulf saying, yes, Gulf was involved in exploring for oil in the Atlantic, in a “consortium” of 32 oil companies doing the searching. These included the companies that all had issued denials. This was a first lesson in oil industry honesty, an oxymoron.