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Moratorium Battle Teeters on Oil Dollars

Submitted by Owen Poindexter on Tuesday, Jul 13th, 2010

July 13, 2010 - While the Obama administration [tangles with the courts](#) over a [moratorium on offshore drilling](#), legislators have taken matters into their own hands. Since the spill in the Gulf of Mexico on April 20th, seven bills have been introduced that call for a permanent prohibition on offshore drilling in specific areas and two call for a temporary stoppage in the Gulf. Others allow for more drilling but improve various standards around doing so. At the other end of the spectrum, three bills have been introduced that would end the moratorium on offshore drilling. The legislators introducing permanent bans have taken relatively little money from the oil industry in recent years. Those calling for the moratorium to be lifted were among the industry's top recipients.

The Moratorium: *Make it Permanent ...*

Representative [Kathy Castor](#) authored a bill ([HR 5358](#)) that would prevent offshore drilling around her state of Florida. Another Florida Representative, [Corrine Brown](#), introduced a bill ([HR 5287](#)) to ban drilling off of the entire East Coast and the Gulf of Mexico. Sen. [Barbara Boxer](#) and Rep. [John Garamendi](#), both of California, each sponsored a bill ([S 3358](#), [HR 5213](#)) designating the shores off of the West Coast as no-drill areas. Rep. [Frank Pallone](#) (D-N.J.) and Sen. [Bernard Sanders](#) (I-Vt.) went the furthest with bills ([HR 5248](#), [S 3433](#)) that would permanently prohibit drilling on the entire Outer Continental Shelf, an area defined as the East and West coasts, the Gulf of Mexico and the coast of Alaska. (Sanders' bill would also increase vehicle mileage standards.)

Of the two senators, Boxer has taken \$13,000 over the last six years from oil interests, 81th out of the 100 senators, but more than Sanders' \$3,300, which places him 93th. None of the four Representatives above received more than \$1,000 from oil interests in the past two years.

...Or End It.

Those calling for the moratorium to be lifted have received significant oil money in the most recent cycle. Representatives [Bill Cassidy](#) (R-La.) and [Pete Olson](#) (R-Texas) have received \$61,600 and \$172,750 respectively, in the last two years from the oil industry. Olson's total is third highest of the 435 House members, and Cassidy's is 38th. In the Senate, [David Vitter's](#) (R-La.) \$559,386 over six years is the second highest total. The three have brought nearly identical bills: ([HR 5525](#), [S 3489](#), [HR 5519](#)) calling for an end to the moratorium on offshore drilling (Cassidy's also calls for the Secretary of the Interior to ensure the safety of all future drilling projects).

The Middle Ground

Between these two poles, both in the scope of the bills and their sponsors' funding from the oil industry, are several more moderate bills. Two bills from Florida, one from Democrat [Kendrick Meek](#) ([HR 5222](#)) and the other from Republican [Vern Buchanan](#), ([HR 5436](#)), call for a moratorium on offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico until the spill has been cleaned up (as judged by the Secretary of the Interior). Meek's bill goes further, suspending all offshore drilling until the Secretary makes recommendations.

Sen. [Jeff Bingaman](#) (D-N.M.), Sen. [Scott Brown](#) (R-Mass.) and Rep. [Gerald Connolly](#) (D-Va.) sponsored bills that alter the bureaucracy around granting offshore drilling permits. Brown's bill ([S 3497](#)) would require a drilling company to have a spill response plan, which the Secretary of the Interior would have to approve. Bingaman's ([S 3516](#)) would establish new agencies to oversee the leasing, permitting and safety of oil drilling and minimize conflict of interest within these bureaus. Connolly's bill ([HR 5506](#)) was the most dramatic. It would require a detailed assessment of the environmental impact of any proposed drilling or exploration on the Outer Continental Shelf, before the action could be approved.

Sen. [Frank Lautenberg](#) (D-N.J.) offered a quartet of bills with an eye toward preventing future spills. One bill ([S 685](#)) requires oil tankers to have double hulls. Another ([S 3492](#)) would make oil companies build emergency relief wells, which would mitigate the effects of a potential spill. A third bill ([S 3443](#)) from Lautenberg -- and a provision in Connolly's bill mentioned above -- would eliminate a rule requiring the Secretary of the Interior to accept or reject any proposed drilling projects within thirty days. His last bill ([S 3343](#)) would introduce a \$10/acre fee on leased offshore land. The money would go toward a fund to help reduce U.S. dependence on oil.

Each of these "middle ground" bills is sponsored by legislators who took more oil money than the ones calling for a permanent moratorium and less than those attempting to end the moratorium. Which of these bills makes it to President Obama's desk remains to be seen, but it is clear that the oil industry knows where its support lies.

