

FLORIDA EDITORIAL BOARDS ACROSS THE STATE OPPOSE HOUSE OIL DRILLING BILL

“... folly ...”

-The Orlando Sentinel

“Drilling off Florida's coastlines is still a bad idea.”

- Pensacola News Journal

“...Cannon's justification for the amendment is ludicrous for its predictability and shortsightedness.”

- Daytona Beach News Journal

“Greased bill should be allowed to die a quiet death.”

- Miami Herald

“It is a dangerous pipedream, one that could ruin Florida's economy and coastal waters.”

- The Tampa Tribune

“The industry is preying on Tallahassee's desperation for new revenue that doesn't involve raising taxes. And it's hoping to avoid scrutiny for a plan that does nothing for the state's current fiscal crisis, endangers pristine beaches and does little to solve America's energy problems.”

- The St. Petersburg Times

“... the governor and the state Senate should block this initiative until it can be looked at with the care it needs.”

- Ft. Myers News-Press

“A combination of energy, including solar and biofuels already advanced by and in Florida, is more on point. The integrity of Florida’s beaches and marine life is more important than hurry-up politics.”

- Naples News

“... HB 1219 would send the state in wrong direction, in the belief that the state and nation can drill their way toward progress.”

- The Sarasota Herald Tribune

“... a preposterous giveaway.”

- South Florida Sun Sentinel

“Floridians shouldn’t stand for it.”

- Gainseville Sun

THE PENSACOLA NEWS JOURNAL

Offshore drilling still not welcome in Florida

April 23, 2009

The debate over lifting Florida's offshore drilling ban is back, but the decision should be the same: **Drilling off Florida's coastlines is still a bad idea**. Conscientious state leaders have long opposed offshore drilling not just for environmental motivations but for economic reasons. They recognize what clean beaches mean to the state's economy.

Any coastline threatened by offshore drilling could devastate an economy that relies heavily on tourism. But, of course, the fear that those economies are threatened is based on the environmental concerns about the drilling. So even those who worry about the economic impact are admitting that it's about the potential environmental impact.

That's why we are disheartened by an amendment that passed the House Policy Council on Tuesday that would allow drilling leases as close as 3 miles from shore.

If passed, the bill would replace Florida's ban on drilling with a new proposal that allows the Cabinet and the governor to accept proposals for oil and gas exploration.

Given the objections to offshore drilling, it was not surprising that the public didn't get a chance to debate the amendment until late Monday night. In contrast, Council members had a chance to hear well-prepared research reports from oil and gas officials as well as results from an industry-supported poll highlighting waning opposition to offshore drilling.

It's true that support of Florida's ban on offshore drilling has slipped in recent years as the cost of gas rose during a period last year to \$4 per gallon. In 2006, President George W. Bush signed a law opening up drilling in the western Gulf but, because of environmental concerns for Florida's coastline, the law prohibited drilling within 100 to 125 miles off the state's coast.

Even as the demand for energy increased, the goal in anti-drilling efforts has been to keep rigs in the Gulf of Mexico at least 100 miles off the coast of Florida, from the Panhandle to the Keys.

There is no reason to reverse the state's long-held opposition to offshore drilling.

Gov. Crist should take a stand and veto any measure that threatens Florida's coastlines.

The Orlando Sentinel

What we think: Drilling threatens coast

April 24, 2009

Rep. Dean Cannon's plan to open Florida's coast to oil and gas drilling deserves all the ridicule it's getting, given its sheer preposterousness.

But it's folly to deride the plan without also appreciating the possibility of it actually passing Florida's Legislature.

A lot of folks in Tallahassee actually like it. Important, powerful folks.

Folks like Senate budget chief J.D. Alexander, who said he backs the idea of opening the Gulf to energy exploration.

And Gov. Charlie Crist. Mr. Crist said he's entertaining the plan because he's "open minded" and "intrigued" by the potential to extract oil "in a way that is safe, in a way that is clean and in a way that generates a lot of revenue for the state of Florida."

Cha-ching! The governor's last point — generating revenue — is what's driving him.

The state's facing a \$6 billion budget deficit and shortfalls in ensuing years if it doesn't make deep cuts in services and tap new revenue sources. Mr. Cannon's plan — ridding the state of its

drilling ban by giving the energy industry the ability to set up rigs in a zone between 3 and 10 miles offshore — would give the state some of that revenue.

Any company wanting to apply for the chance to troll the waters would have to pay the state a \$1 million non-refundable application fee. And according to the oil industry that's in lock-step with Mr. Cannon on his bill, the state also could collect \$1.6 billion in royalties and taxes if the wells produce oil.

But here's where things get ridiculous. Mr. Cannon says that even though the state would be soliciting applications to drill, the governor and Cabinet in their review of them would be under "no obligation whatsoever" to approve them.

Right. The oil industry will, year after year, happily pay a million dollars for one application after another without the expectation that the state will approve many of them.

And if the idea's to make it difficult to obtain a drilling permit, why give the governor and Cabinet every opportunity to approve them? Oil companies could skirt common standards set up for other applicants in Florida, who have to show how their plans won't damage the environment. Rather, the governor and Cabinet would just have to find the drilling applications "not contrary to the public welfare."

More nonsense from Mr. Cannon comes wrapped in promises that money raised from drilling could fund Florida Forever. It's nonsense to think that unpredictable oil-lease payments would work to finance the state's land-buying program.

If the Legislature and Mr. Crist approve Mr. Cannon's giveaway to the oil industry, things could get really dangerous. **The industry contends its drilling doesn't produce oil spills. But the Minerals Management Service, the federal agency regulating offshore drilling, reported 124 oil spills caused by hurricanes in 2005.**

No wonder that Congress has imposed a drilling ban in the Gulf of Mexico covering federal waters 10 to 125 miles off Florida's coast.

Yet the greater threat to the environment than drilling comes from the infrastructure supporting the rigs: the tankers, land-based storage facilities and pipelines. They'd infringe on the coast's fragile estuaries, bays, river grass beds and wildlife.

Mr. Cannon's gift to energy companies also could help sink a measure that actually could benefit the environment. The commuter-rail project for Central Florida, which Mr. Cannon calls his No. 1 priority, requires his muscle to pass the Legislature.

He needs to devote his time and energy to saving commuter rail, not serving Big Oil.

THE DAYTONA BEACH NEWS JOURNAL

Rigs on the Horizon

Big Oil's Back with another attack on state's drilling ban

April 23, 2009

Give oil and gas company lobbyists this: They are persistent. And so are the legislators who shill for them year after year with attempts to lift Florida's ban on drilling in state waters. But give them nothing more, certainly not the amendment passed by the Republican-dominated House Policy Council, 17-6, Tuesday to permit oil and gas exploration 3.5 miles from the state's east coast and 11 miles from its Gulf coast.

This year Dean Cannon, R-Orlando, in line to become the next state House speaker, is leading a stealth attack. He sprung the amendment Tuesday, replacing language in a bill up for its last vote before reaching the House floor. The shenanigans aside, **Cannon's justification for the amendment is ludicrous for its predictability and shortsightedness.**

He's using the weak economy as excuse, suggesting that Florida needs the proposed \$1 million fee from each oil or gas company exploration permit approved by the governor to help alleviate budget constraints. Never mind what havoc might occur to the state's economy and budget from eventual oil operations along both coasts of this tourist-dependent state.

Drill, baby, drill remains a mantra of the state's Republican leaders. And don't forget Gov. Crist's flip-flop last year in support of off-coast drilling in hopes of winning John McCain's nod as his vice presidential candidate. Who knows where the governor will be on this proposal. The state Cabinet, with Crist on board, bought back \$12.5 million in drilling leases just before Jeb Bush left office to protect the peninsula's Gulf coastline and end a long legal battle. The state would now have to issue more than a dozen permits just to recoup that money. So much for Cannon's economic-benefit argument.

Audubon Policy Director Eric Draper put it this way in a news release Tuesday, "Audubon rigorously opposes this destructive proposal because it would impact Florida coastal ecosystems and our pristine beaches, put marine and coastal wildlife at risk, and delay the serious measures needed to reduce global warming and its impacts on the state and our quality of life." He called on the Legislature to abandon the dirty attack on the drilling plan and instead pass fuel efficiency requirements for cars and trucks sold in the state that would reduce greenhouse gases.

Now there's an idea that deserves legislators' support, Cannon-like stealth or otherwise. But **you won't see the headlights of clean cars on Florida's roads as long as Cannon and company are envisioning lighted oil rigs on coastal horizons. Shill, baby, shill.**

THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

EDITORIAL: Oil drilling no way to fuel recovery

April 22, 2009

The effort to open up Florida's waters to oil drilling illustrates how ill-equipped the legislative leadership is to rebuild the state's economy.

The same lawmakers who believe an overbuilt state with a backlog of unsold homes needs to eliminate development controls also think that allowing oil rigs to crowd close to Florida's beaches will ease its financial woes.

It is a dangerous pipedream, one that could ruin Florida's economy and coastal waters.

The drilling - which requires the use of heavy metal, toxic metals and polluting muds - would not occur far offshore in federal waters, where perhaps a case can be made for additional drilling.

This legislation applies to state-controlled waters from three to 10 miles offshore. It would be possible for rigs to operate within sight of shore.

Supporters say new technologies minimize the visual disruption and pollution threat. Perhaps. But drilling immediately offshore provides the state no margin of error when the inevitable accident occurs.

Yet Rep. Dean Cannon, an Orlando Republican scheduled to become House speaker next year, thinks this would benefit a state whose clean waters and sandy beaches underpin its appeal and sustain a \$65-billion-a-year tourism industry that employs 1 million people.

Under the proposal the governor and members of the Cabinet would vote on oil companies' exploration requests. The companies would have to post a \$500 million bond. It is being pushed hard by the oil industry and affiliated special interests. A House panel approved it Tuesday.

This misguided effort was abruptly launched in the final weeks of the session, revealing a stunning disregard for the need to carefully scrutinize a change with such dramatic impacts.

Even more alarming is how this scheme shows legislative leaders are looking to the past rather than trying to seize new economic opportunities.

President Barack Obama's administration clearly is going to emphasize clean, renewable energy

and seek to reduce the nation's dependence on oil. Just last week the U.S Environmental Protection Agency signaled it would eventually use the Clean Air Act to limit the use of greenhouse gases.

One does not have to accept the doomsayers' warnings about climate change to recognize the nation's energy dynamics will change.

And the transition to clean domestically produced energy sources is expected to create millions of American jobs and make the nation more energy independent. Florida has the potential to generate energy and jobs from biomass, solar, wind and waves.

Yet the same House leadership that would put Florida's beaches at risk has refused to consider reasonable legislation that would help boost investment in renewables.

The measure, as fashioned by the Senate, would require electric utilities to obtain 20 percent of their power from clean energy by 2020. It is not overly burdensome. It even allows clean coal technology and nuclear to be counted toward that renewable energy target.

The legislation, besides assuring Florida a cleaner energy supply, would ignite investment in homegrown industries.

Instead of looking for ways to build an economy - and energy industry - for the future, **the House simply seeks to turn the Florida coast over to Big Oil. That won't produce many jobs. It won't revive the economy. And it could forever taint Florida's coastal waters.**

But it will please powerful special interests - and that appears to be what counts the most in the state House.

THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

Shameful oil drilling ploy

Tuesday, April 21, 2009

House Speaker-designate Dean Cannon's attempt to pitch his legislation to open waters off Florida's shores to drilling as the beginning of a "mature, thoughtful conversation" about the state's energy future is an insult to Floridians and disingenuous. House Republican leaders are showing a shameless willingness to put the interests of a powerful industry over their constituents' in pursuit of an easy buck.

Cannon, R-Orlando, sprang the radical idea to allow oil rigs within 3 miles of the coast in the eighth week of a nine-week legislative session. And he did it even as the House has failed to consider the governor's plan to foster renewable energy. **Florida needs more than 10 days to consider changing a law that has protected its shores for decades, and the Senate and governor should reject it.**

Clearly, Associated Industries of Florida has been working with Cannon for weeks to try to reverse a 20-year drilling ban — though Cannon unveiled it just 12 hours before it passed a House council Tuesday. A pollster hired to do a survey, an industry expert from Texas and an Orlando economist touting potential revenue all testified. Cannon contended HB 1219 is merely an attempt "to have a mature, thoughtful conversation about what we want to do about this." So why is the public just now hearing about it?

The answer: **The industry is preying on Tallahassee's desperation for new revenue that doesn't involve raising taxes. And it's hoping to avoid scrutiny** for a plan that does nothing for the state's current fiscal crisis, endangers pristine beaches and does little to solve America's energy problems.

Cannon's plan would require the governor and Cabinet to accept \$1 million application fees from bidders interested in exploring state-controlled waters that stretch to 10 miles offshore. If a bid is accepted, the state would require a \$500 million bond before drilling and one-eighth of royalties.

Industry officials contend new technology greatly reduces potential for environmental hazards. And they happily note there were no major problems from offshore platforms from Hurricane Katrina. But Louisiana officials say 8.2 million gallons of oil were spilled during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, including damage the storms did to onshore storage sites and pipelines. That infrastructure would likely grow in Florida if offshore drilling began within 10 miles of the coast.

It would be years before Florida would reap significant financial rewards from drilling, which would do little to lessen the nation's dependence on foreign oil. Cannon notes his bill doesn't require drilling — the governor and Cabinet could reject bids "contrary to the public welfare." But that is a dramatically weaker standard than most state environmental protections where applicants must prove plans won't harm the environment.

The Republican's late-session surprise appears to be a politically calculated move to appeal to an industry with deep pockets, and it would put Florida at unnecessary risk. It hardly reflects the caliber of public policy or leadership expected from a lawmaker who aspires to hold one of the most powerful political offices in the state.

FT MYERS NEWS-PRESS

EDITORIAL: Stop sneak attack on drilling ban

It's a good idea to permit cautious oil and natural gas exploration in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, in federal waters well off Florida's coast.

But surprise legislation now whizzing through the state House of Representatives to lift the drilling ban in waters close to the state's beaches and bays is a sneak attack.

It is calculated to circumvent the full debate this important issue needs, and could backfire on proponents of drilling by reversing a favorable recent trend in public opinion toward drilling.

Keeping rigs well offshore provides a buffer that, in the unlikely event of a spill, allows the oil to disperse or be contained before it can damage our priceless tourist beaches and rich coastal bays.

The proposal would lift the state ban on drilling in Florida waters from 3 to 10 miles out, giving the governor and Cabinet the power to lease sea bottom for oil and gas exploration and production.

The proponents of House Bill 1219 and its companion Senate Bill 2294 make a good case for offshore drilling in general: State-of-the-art drilling has an excellent safety record, surviving recent strong hurricanes with no significant offshore spills; drilling could generate billions in royalties to the state and create thousands of jobs; natural gas is a relatively clean fuel that could help reduce U.S. dependence on foreign fossil fuels.

With such a strong case to be made for offshore drilling, there's no need to try to slip this legislation through in the waning days of a session.

Gov. Charlie Crist has said his mind is open on offshore drilling well offshore. He has indicated he will look at this proposal, too.

But **the governor and the state Senate should block this initiative until it can be looked at with the care it needs.**

NAPLES NEWS

Editorial: Offshore oil drilling ... what's driving the timing of late-session legislation?

Wednesday, April 22, 2009

What's the rush?

In the waning days of a legislative session that was touted as being all about balancing a budget in difficult times, with a dash of Indian gaming mixed in, a proposal to allow oil exploration as close as three miles off the Florida coast makes a late appearance.

Oil rigs three miles offshore? This is no small matter. It ought not be treated as an afterthought. Even proponents of domestic energy production, the “drill here, drill now” crowd, have to take pause at the suddenness with which the issue popped up on the Tuesday agenda of the Florida House Policy Council.

The fact that its supporters were well-prepared to make their case and likely opponents in the environmental community were given scant notice to form a rebuttal suggests a strategy that seeks to avoid, rather than welcome, the sunshine of open governance.

The billions of dollars supporters of close-in offshore oil drilling say their plan could produce would come in future years and do little to plug the holes in the budget the Legislature is now trying to piece together, thereby eliminating the only possible argument for accelerated consideration — that the money would bail us out of today's jam.

There is a substantial inventory of potential oil and gas exploration sites remaining unused. Plus, oil alone is not the future. **A combination of energy, including solar and biofuels already advanced by and in Florida, is more on point. The integrity of Florida's beaches and marine life is more important than hurry-up politics.**

There is no reason we know of that the important questions only touched upon in Tuesday's hearing — can Florida really thrive as a tourist mecca with rigs as close as three miles? Does putting the say-so in the hands of the governor and Cabinet, as opposed to the whole Legislature, grant too much power to too few people? — can't be fully explored at a later date.

That means a time and place announced well in advance, with advocates on both sides as well as the public informed of the pros and cons heading in.

FLORIDA (JACKSONVILLE) TIMES UNION

Surprise move to drill in Gulf makes for bad splash

By [Ron Littlepage](#)

Thursday, Apr. 23, 2009

Republicans in the Legislature are once again using the lousy economy as cover for another assault on the environment.

Previously they plotted to weaken environmental permitting regulations to the delight of developers.

Then on Tuesday, which happened to be the day before Earth Day, they unveiled a plan to lift the state's ban on drilling for oil and gas in Florida's offshore waters in the Gulf of Mexico.

The surprise amendment - authored by Rep. Dean Cannon, who is in line to be the next House speaker - came with a little more than a week left in this legislative session.

It would give the governor and Cabinet the authority to grant offshore leases as close as three miles to the Gulf's beaches.

Cannon told reporters in Tallahassee that "I just want to start a dialogue." Apparently, he wanted the dialogue to be one-sided.

When the House Policy Council took up the amendment, supporters were in full force and they obviously had been working on the idea for some time.

Representatives of the Associated Industries of Florida were there. Also in tow were the normal hired guns - a pollster, an economist and public relations people.

According to news reports, Cannon made a lengthy pitch that included a Power Point presentation complete with handouts, charts and photos.

Traditional opponents to offshore drilling - environmentalists, tourism officials, anglers, beachgoers and some politicians - hadn't been let in on the deal.

"I apologize for not having a fancy presentation," Susan Glickman, an environmental lobbyist, was quoted in news reports as saying. "We did not get the same memo."

That's not the way to encourage a dialogue, especially on an issue this important and with so little session time left.

The House council approved the amendment. The main hook is the projection that Florida could get as much as \$1.6 billion in royalties a year.

But tourism alone - with the state's beaches being a big draw - produces about \$4 billion a year in sales tax revenue.

Would beaches covered with tar balls or an oil spill attract as many visitors? Obviously no.

A real dialogue - not a monologue - might very well be worth having.

Lessening our country's dependence on foreign oil makes sense for national security, but so does increasing alternative energy sources.

More revenue for the state when critical needs are going unmet and the creation of thousands of jobs also can't be ignored.

But is drilling as environmentally safe as those who sprang this idea at the last-minute claim?

The Florida Oceans and Coastal Resources Council says coastal activities pump more than \$400 billion into the state's economy every year.

That's a lot to gamble with.

SARASOTA HERALD TRIBUNE

A Mandate for drilling

Little-noticed legislation could have far-reaching impact on Florida's coast

April 23, 2009

Proponents of voiding state and federal bans on oil and gas drilling in Florida's waters -- specifically, off the West Coast -- portray pending legislation as a benign, incremental effort to allow "conversation" and "dialogue."

But, despite its brevity, House Bill 1219 provides a far-reaching mandate that demands thorough review and debate which it has not yet received.

The bill, amended and approved this week by a key group in the Florida House of Representatives, directs the Department of Environmental Protection to "develop a plan, including legislative recommendations, for the implementation of an offshore oil and natural gas drilling program ..."

Note that the bill does not simply provide for discussions. It would require a plan for implementing oil and gas drilling in Florida's coastal waters.

HB 1219 also calls for the plan to provide "protection to the state's environment," but it is clearly designed for "facilitating the recovery and distribution of offshore oil and natural gas reserves."

Furthermore, one version of the bill considered in the House mandated "an expedited permitting process for all offshore and onshore activities associated with ... oil and natural gas products."

The proposed legislation would put the DEP's planning on a fast track: The bill provides for the plan to be submitted by Dec. 31, 2009, to the Legislature for consideration.

The House's powerful Policy Council voted 17-7 Tuesday in favor of the bill. Representatives from our region cast opposite votes: Keith Fitzgerald, a Sarasota Democrat, voted no; Bill Galvano, a Bradenton Republican, voted yes.

A floor vote is the next step in the House.

Fortunately, a companion bill in the Senate is stalled. It should stay that way

There are serious problems with the legislation, in process and substance.

A rushed process

The process has been rushed. The first committee hearing -- in the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Committee -- didn't occur until March 24.

The bill didn't gain significant attention until it was heard Tuesday -- late in the Legislature's annual 60-day session -- and pushed out of the Policy Council without full consideration of all sides of the debate.

As Rep. Fitzgerald told Herald-Tribune reporter Joe Follick: "I don't see why we have to wait until 10 days" before the end of the session, hear "an hourlong PowerPoint presentation from one side, then be asked to make a decision."

The problems with the substance of HB 1212 are even more serious. Consider that:

The bill would allow proposals for drilling as close as three miles off Florida's West Coast, in an area extending from Pensacola to Naples. Since 1990, Florida has explicitly banned exploration and drilling in such areas, up to 10 miles offshore; for 26 years, the federal government protected huge sections of the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

Those protections were supported by Republican and Democratic administrations and lawmakers because they recognized that the value of Florida's tourism, recreation and environment far outweighs any potential benefits of drilling near the coast.

Threat to tourism economy

Proponents note that states such as Mississippi and Louisiana gain millions of dollars annually through lease royalties, and contend that Florida could gain \$31 billion in revenues over 20 years. Compare those impacts, if they materialized, to the value of Florida's \$50-billion-a-year tourism industry, which is highly dependent on clean beaches and waters.

There are conflicting opinions on the risk of oil spills from drilling rigs and pipelines, especially in the hurricane-prone Gulf of Mexico. The potential of the bill to open the way for refineries on Florida's West Coast adds another layer of concern. In sum, the risks and costs should be part of any analysis of the possible financial benefits.

There is no compelling evidence that opening Florida's waters to drilling -- for oil, in particular -- would drive down prices at the fuel pump or lead to "energy independence."

The United States has less than 3 percent of the world's oil reserves but consumes 25 percent of the supply. Even so, as of last year, less than a quarter of the 90 million acres of federal lands leased to oil companies were being used to provide oil or gas.

The U.S. Department of Energy has consistently reported that untapped domestic supplies are so minimal -- relative to Americans' rate of consumption -- that untapped reserves don't have the capacity to significantly affect prices or reduce dependency on foreign sources. The Energy Department has also reported that it would take up to 10 years for areas under new leases to produce fuel for consumption.

Another agency, the U.S. Energy Information Administration, said in 2007 that increasing "access to the Pacific, Atlantic and eastern Gulf regions would not have a significant impact on domestic crude oil and natural gas production or prices before 2030."

If Florida and the nation wait until 2020 or 2030 to implement vigorous alternative-energy strategies, no amount of domestic production would likely make a positive impact economically, politically or environmentally.

Gov. Charlie Crist persuaded the Legislature in 2007 to adopt goals for reducing the state's reliance on oil and other fossil fuels by taking steps to reduce demands and increase the viability of alternative sources.

The governor and a task force recognized that the environmental and economic risks of waiting to adopt new policies and strategies for energy. Bills pending in the Legislature would guide Florida in the right way; **HB 1219 would send the state in wrong direction, in the belief that the state and nation can drill their way toward progress.**

SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL

New drilling bill is a preposterous giveaway

April 24, 2009

Rep. Dean Cannon's plan to open Florida's coast to oil and gas drilling deserves all the ridicule it's getting, given its sheer preposterousness.

But it's folly to deride the plan without also appreciating the possibility of it actually passing Florida's Legislature, which is desperate for revenue.

The state's facing a \$6 billion deficit and shortfalls in ensuing years if it doesn't make deep cuts in services and tap new revenue sources. Cannon's plan — ridding the state of its drilling ban by giving the energy industry the chance to set up rigs three to 10 miles offshore — would give the state some of that revenue.

Any company wanting to apply for the chance to troll the waters would have to pay the state a \$1 million non-refundable application fee. According to the oil industry, the state also could collect \$1.6 billion in royalties and taxes if the wells produce oil.

But here's where things get ridiculous. Cannon says the governor and Cabinet would be under "no obligation whatsoever" to approve them.

Right. The oil industry will happily pay a million dollars for one application after another without the expectation that the state will approve many of them?

And if the idea's to make it difficult to obtain a drilling permit, why give the governor and Cabinet every chance to approve them? Oil firms could skirt standards set up for other applicants in Florida. Rather, the governor and Cabinet would just have to find the applications "not contrary to the public welfare."

More nonsense from Cannon, R-Winter Park, comes wrapped in promises that money raised from drilling could fund Florida Forever. The unpredictability of oil-lease payments working to help finance the state's land-buying program is a pipe dream.

But if Cannon's giveaway is approved, things could get really dangerous. The Minerals Management Service, which regulates offshore drilling, reported 124 oil spills caused by hurricanes in 2005.

No wonder why Congress has imposed a drilling ban in the Gulf of Mexico covering federal waters 10 to 125 miles off Florida's coast. The state shouldn't undermine that wise ban with this nonsense.

THE MIAMI HERALD

OUR OPINION: Greased bill should be allowed to die a quiet death

April 22, 2009

A bill passed by the House Policy Council on Tuesday was the first crack in the heretofore impenetrable wall against oil and gas drilling off Florida's coast in the Gulf of Mexico. Supporters, however, used a stacked deck to get the job done.

Council members heard a well-prepared, carefully calibrated pitch from oil and gas officials using facts and figures, and a favorable industry-supported poll showing weakening opposition to drilling. The amendment, however, wasn't made available for the public to see until Monday night -- leaving no time for real debate.

Drilling ban

The bill (HB 1219) passed 17-6 along party lines, with Rep. Yolly Roberson, D-Miami, the only Democrat voting in favor. The bill opens a door to drilling that has been closed for 30 years. It replaces Florida's ban on drilling with a plan that allows the governor and Cabinet to accept proposals for oil and gas exploration. The state could charge \$1 million for each application to explore a limited area between 3 and 10 miles offshore. Despite the bill's poor prospects -- a similar measure in the Senate isn't moving -- the lure of easy money during a recession should not be underestimated.

The measure represents a breach in years of solid opposition among Florida politicians, Republicans and Democrats, to offshore drilling. Even still, there is no good reason to reverse Florida's well-justified opposition to drilling. Gov. Crist should veto any measure that reaches his desk.

Support of Florida's ban on offshore drilling has slipped in recent years as the cost of gas ballooned to more than \$4 per gallon. In 2006, President George W. Bush signed a law opening up drilling in the western Gulf but, because of environmental concerns for Florida's coastline, the law prohibited drilling within 100 to 125 miles off the state's coast.

Drilling advocates, including Associated Industries of Florida, say that increasing worldwide demand for oil supports the need for offshore drilling and improved technology makes it possible to drill more safely. "Today's new, advanced technology makes it possible to extract oil and natural gas in a way that largely protects viewscapes from the shore and preserves coastal environments," AIF president Barney Bishop said in an e-mail to newspapers.

Storing and transporting

Accidental spills during drilling aren't the only concern, nor are they the biggest risk. Just as much or more environmental degradation comes from storing and transporting oil and gas. Coast Guard data show that between

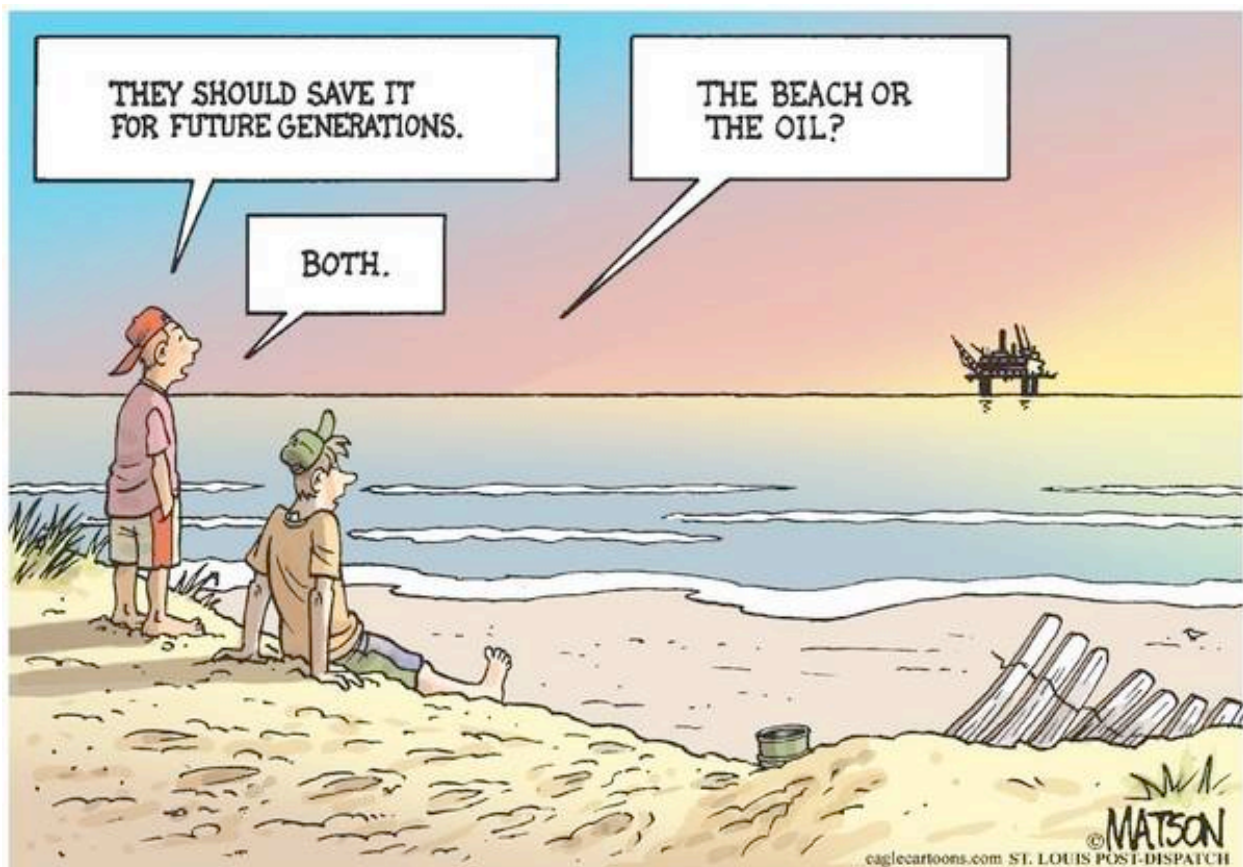
1973 and 2000, tankers spilled an average of 1.3 million gallons of oil in U.S. marine waters.

Besides that, there is a more prudent reason to reject drilling off Florida's coast: a paucity of oil in the area under consideration. Of the 9.22 trillion gallons of natural gas and 2.8 billion barrels of oil believed to be in the eastern Gulf, most of the reserves are many miles off Florida's coast line.

This bill should die with the Policy Council's vote. That is the fate it deserves.

GAINESVILLE SUN

Editorial: Sneak attack



Cagle Cartoons

April 24

Proponents of voiding state and federal bans on oil and gas drilling in Florida's waters portray pending legislation as a benign, incremental effort to allow "conversation" and "dialogue." House Bill 1219 is anything but that.

The bill, amended and approved this week by a key group in the Florida House of Representatives, directs the Department of Environmental Protection to "develop a plan, including legislative recommendations, for the implementation of an offshore oil and natural gas drilling program ...". It would put the DEP's planning on a fast track: a plan must be submitted by Dec. 31, 2009.

The bill would allow proposals for drilling as close as three miles off Florida's West Coast, in an area extending from Pensacola to Naples. Since 1990, Florida has explicitly banned exploration and drilling in such areas, up to 10 miles offshore; for 26 years, the federal government protected huge sections of the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

Proponents note that states such as Mississippi and Louisiana gain millions of dollars annually through lease royalties, and contend that Florida could gain \$31 billion in revenues over 20 years. Compare those impacts, if they materialized, to the value of Florida's \$50-billion-a-year tourism industry, which is highly dependent on clean beaches and waters.

There is no compelling evidence that opening Florida's waters to drilling would drive down prices at the fuel pump or lead to "energy independence."

The United States has less than 3 percent of the world's oil reserves but consumes 25 percent of the supply. Even so, as of last year, less than a quarter of the 90 million acres of federal lands leased to oil companies were being used to provide oil or gas.

The U.S. Department of Energy has consistently reported that untapped domestic supplies are so minimal that untapped reserves don't have the capacity to significantly affect prices or reduce dependency on foreign sources.

The Energy Department has also reported that **it would take up to 10 years for areas under new leases to produce fuel for consumption.**

Alas, once a staunch opponent of drilling, Gov. Charlie Crist now says he's got an "open-mind" about the issue. Sadly, that's exactly the sort of blow-with-the-prevailing-political-winds posturing we've come to expect from the governor.

We agree with Florida's U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, who said Wednesday: "Those who now propose to allow oil rigs know full well the plan will do nothing to reduce energy prices or reduce our country's reliance on oil. This simply is the agenda of big-oil interests hiding behind shadowy advocacy groups and controlling Florida's lawmakers."

It is a cruel joke that lawmakers chose the occasion of Earth Week to spring this ill-conceived assault on Florida's environmental wellbeing. Floridians shouldn't stand for it.