



Senator Feinstein Joins Environmental Leaders to Warn of Growing Threat of New Offshore Oil Drilling

August 29, 2006

Santa Monica, Calif. – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today joined Santa Monica Baykeeper, Heal the Bay, Environmental Defense Center, Natural Resources Defense Council and Environment Now to call for protection of California’s coast from oil drilling. The following is a statement by Senator Feinstein:

“We are here today to alert California to the growing possibility that there could be new oil drilling off the coast of California.

In 1981, Congress passed a measure to protect the Pacific and Atlantic coasts from offshore drilling. And each year, for the past 25 years, Congress has voted to renew that bill.

Former President George H.W. Bush created an additional moratorium in 1991, which prohibited leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf until 2002. Former President Clinton extended the deferral to 2011, and President George W. Bush has said he would not reverse the executive order.

But today, these federal protections are in jeopardy.

In June, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives passed a bill that would lift the current federal moratoria that protect the Atlantic and Pacific outer continental shelf (OCS) from oil and gas drilling. This would permit unreliable and unsightly oil rigs to be as close as three miles to our beaches.

Specifically:

- For areas 100 miles or more offshore, the Pombo bill would permanently eliminate the federal moratorium.
- Between 50 and 100 miles offshore, the moratorium would also be lifted, unless the State legislature votes to ban drilling. And, even then, the ban would have to be renewed every 5 years.

- Between 3 and 50 miles, the coastline would be protected. But the State Legislature could choose to opt-out of the moratorium in order to secure significant new financial incentives from the oil industry for drilling.
- The bill also waives environmental protections, and allows slant drilling for National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries located off our coasts.

Earlier this month, the Senate passed a separate offshore drilling bill for the Gulf of Mexico. The bill extended the drilling ban off the west coast of Florida until 2022, but the Republican leadership refused to offer the same protection to California. That is why Senator Boxer and I voted against the Senate bill.

While the Senate bill does not directly threaten California's coastline, we are very concerned that a House-Senate Conference Committee could report out a bill that **does open up** our coast to drilling.

So far, we have managed to delay a conference on procedural grounds. But when we return from the August recess, we may face a very difficult battle. Senator Boxer and I have vowed to stand firm. We believe the Senate should only agree to a conference if the House takes the Pombo bill off the table.

But Congressman Pombo, who chairs the House Resources Committee, has deemed the Senate bill unacceptable. **That's why we are here today – we need to raise the red flag and alert Californians to the danger we face.**

Even if we win this battle, there are other serious threats. In 1994, the California Legislature passed a bill that permanently prohibited the extraction of oil and gas in State waters. However, this law has a major loophole—it allows for drilling in the state tidelands, if a well in federal waters is pulling oil and gas from nearby state reserves.

Two companies are looking to take advantage of that loophole and want to drill off the coast of California not far from the site of the Santa Barbara oil spill:

- Plains Exploration, which operates Platform Irene in federal water, would like to slant drill 30 new wells from Platform Irene but in State Tidelands.
- ExxonMobil and Sunset Exploration want to drill the same wells but from Vandenberg Air Force Base.

So even if the federal and current state bans are kept in place, we could soon see more oil drilling.

I can still recall the nightmare that began on January 29, 1969, when a Union Oil Co. platform 6 miles off Santa Barbara suffered a blowout. Over 11 days, 200,000 gallons of crude oil spread into an 800 square mile slick.

Incoming tides brought the thick tar to beaches, marring 40 miles of coastline. Corpses of dead seals and dolphins, poisoned by the oil washed up on the shore. More than 3,600 shorebirds were killed by the oil or the detergents used to clean the oil up. And beaches were closed to swimming for more than 3 months.

This was a seminal event for the environmental movement. And the following spring marked the first Earth Day.

A healthy coastline is vital to California's economy and our quality of life. Our State's ocean-dependent industries are estimated to generate \$17 billion of revenue each year. We can't let this kind of environmental catastrophe happen again.

That's why we need a permanent moratorium. Senator Boxer and I have introduced the California Ocean and Coastal Protection Act, to permanently protect California from oil and gas drilling. (The bill was introduced by Congresswoman Capps in the House.)

With the Republican majorities in both the House and Senate, and President Bush in the White House, it is unlikely that this bill will become law this year. But we'll be back, and we will try again, and again, and again, until there is a permanent ban on drilling off the coast of California.

California's coast must be protected from offshore drilling. We will continue to do everything we can to oppose opening our coast to drilling.

We urge Californians to join this fight – and let Congress know we are united in opposition to offshore drilling.”

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