

# **Rep. Mary Bono Mack joins call for new offshore drilling, Sen. Barbara Boxer pushes for West Coast ban**

**Paul C. Barton, Palm Springs Desert Sun, 3-8-11**

WASHINGTON -- Congresswoman Mary Bono Mack wants the Obama administration to allow a faster pace for oil drilling operations in the Gulf of Mexico.

She was among 100 GOP lawmakers putting their names on a letter sent to the White House last week that cited rising oil and gasoline prices and political instability in the Middle East and North Africa as underscoring “the urgency to put our country on a path toward energy independence.”

In December, President Barack Obama placed a new seven-year ban on offshore drilling off the West and East coasts, as well as in the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

Meanwhile, the Interior Department permitting process for new drilling in western parts of the gulf has slowed considerably. Republicans contend it amounts to a “de facto moratorium.”

Bono Mack, R-Palm Springs, contends faster approval of drilling permits in the western gulf makes sense in light of recent events and the nation's need for more energy.

“Given America's dangerous dependence on foreign oil — and the threat it poses to our economy, national security and future prosperity — the congresswoman believes that it's more important than ever to keep all of our options open as a nation,” said Bono Mack spokesman Ken Johnson.

“Right now, it makes most sense to maximize our potential in areas where drilling is already allowed. Currently, the Gulf of Mexico accounts for 13 percent of U.S. energy production, but it has vast reserves of untapped oil and natural gas. That's where we should be focusing our attention.”

At least one environmental group disagreed.

“I'm disappointed in any Republican who would sign this,” said Reagan Nelson, specialist on oceans policy for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

“The Interior Department is acting in a prudent manner.”

The department has allowed one new deepwater drilling permit, as well as 32 in shallow water, in the western gulf since a ban on all drilling in the ocean was lifted in October, a pace too slow for House Republicans.