

Thompson opposes off-shore drilling move but is voted down

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Congressman Mike Thompson (D-Napa Valley) voted against legislation that would mandate a sweeping expansion of offshore drilling across the nation.

H.R. 1231, "Reversing President Obama's Offshore Moratorium Act," would automatically open the Southern California coast, the entire Atlantic coast, the Arctic Ocean, and Alaska's Bristol Bay for leasing. The bill could also potentially open up California's North Coast to drilling even if the state objects to offshore drilling in the region.

"There may be enough oil off the North Coast to make oil companies billions of dollars in profits, but there is nowhere near enough to change the reality of our national energy challenges or outweigh the serious risks to North Coast communities," said Thompson. "H.R. 1231 is beyond misguided it is a disaster in the making. I voted against this bill because I refuse to let what happened in the Gulf of Mexico be a possibility on the coast of California."

Specifically, H.R. 1231 mandates that the Secretary of the Interior offer up half of the unleased areas off the Pacific and Atlantic Coasts and offshore Alaska for drilling. Proponents of the bill, including Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (R-WA), have stated that no North Coast drilling will occur because the region does not contain at least 2.5 billion barrels of oil or 7.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. They say the only portion of California that meets these criteria is the Southern California planning area, estimated to contain nearly 6 billion barrels of recoverable oil.

In a decision to "trust but verify," Thompson introduced an amendment clarifying that the North Coast may not be opened for drilling under H.R. 1231. Given the Natural Resources Committee's previous assertions that H.R. 1231 would not open up the entire California coastline to drilling, Rep. Thompson's amendment should have received broad bipartisan support. Instead, the GOP strongly opposed the amendment, setting the stage for future North Coast drilling.

"If this bill's only targets are areas containing the greatest known amount of oil and natural gas, there should be no objection to prohibiting drilling on the North Coast," said Thompson. "The fact that my amendment was defeated because of strong Republican opposition suggests there's still a desire to tap our reserves, no matter the potential cost."

Proponents of H.R. 1231 say it is the solution to rising gas prices. But Thompson points out that according to a 2009 Energy Information Administration report, opening up waters that are currently closed to drilling would only yield an extra 500,000 barrels of oil a day an amount that sounds significant but would reduce gas prices by no more than 3 cents a gallon in 2030.

"In Northern California, the potential economic impact of the region's oil supply is even smaller: if all the recoverable reserves of Northern California's Outer Continental Shelf were tapped, they would provide enough oil to fuel the U.S. for only 100 days," Thompson said.

"Drilling is not the simple answer to rising gas prices," Thompson continued. "We have to invest in American clean energy like solar and wind, as well as green vehicles and efficient cars. These are the actions that will bring about long-term energy independence, create good paying jobs here at home, and bring down gas prices for good."

This is not the first time Thompson has faced efforts to open drilling off the coast of Northern California. In January, the Thompson reintroduced legislation to ban drilling off the coast of Del Norte, Humboldt, and Mendocino Counties. He has also co-sponsored legislation that would prohibit drilling along the entire California coast.