

Carbajal's first bill seeks to ban future oil drilling off California coast

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On Saturday, Central Coast freshman U.S. congressman Salud Carbajal announced the introduction of his first piece of legislation. With the California Clean Coast Act, Carbajal hopes to "permanently ban leasing of oil tracts off our coast, and thereby permanently banning offshore oil development off the California coast."

Carbajal held a press conference in Santa Barbara to announce the legislation on the anniversary of the 1969 oil spill in the Santa Barbara Channel. That spill, in which 100,000 gallons of crude oil spewed from a sea-bed blow-out, remains the largest spill to date off the California coast.

"I undoubtedly represent one of the most beautiful and ecologically diverse districts in Congress," Rep. Carbajal said in a prepared statement. "With this incredible privilege also comes the great responsibility to serve as stewards of our environment. In California, our coastal communities, local economies, and fragile ocean ecosystems cannot afford another disastrous oil spill. That is why it is critical that we pass this legislation to protect our coastal environment from further oil drilling and preserve its beauty and vibrancy for future generations to inherit."

In November, the Obama Administration released the federal government's oil and gas leasing program for offshore federal waters through 2022. Under that plan, no new oil drilling is allowed in federal waters off California's Central Coast, at least for the next five years; the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management was directed not award leases to oil companies that involve drilling off the coasts of Washington, Oregon and California.

In late December, President Obama's administration removed large areas of the Arctic and Atlantic oceans from all future oil and gas exploration. But the president did not include Central Coast waters - or the rest of the West Coast - under the umbrella of permanent protection before he left office.