

# **Assembly oil vote was too slick**

**Assemblyman Curt Hagman, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 11-2-09**

The California state Assembly considered numerous budget bills in September, and among them was Assembly Bill 23, which authorizes an oil drilling lease off the Santa Barbara Coast (T-Ridge). The plan would have implemented state-of-the-art slant-drilling techniques to increase the amount of oil extracted without increasing the number of oil rigs. Probably best of all, the lease would have allowed new drilling on an existing rig, so the "footprint" of the project wouldn't have changed. The lease would have provided an immediate \$100 million payment to California. In fact, this lease would have paid more than \$1.8 billion in royalties over the next 14 years. After the termination of the lease, the oil platforms and all onshore processing facilities would be dismantled and 3,900 acres of land would be donated for public use and conservation.

So why didn't this idea to add millions of dollars to our state pass the Legislature? Because 40 years later, an oil spill off Santa Barbara is still affecting the mindset of our Legislature. The 1969 oil spill was cleaned up but the concerns have lived on and permanently slowed the state's willingness to expand its off-shore drilling capabilities. Since 1969, tremendous technological advances have occurred like cell phones, satellite TV, CAT scans, the Internet, etc., that have benefited our society, and those same types of advances now make oil drilling much safer. The world has changed since 1969, and now it's time to act like it. No longer can a legislator claim that the '69 spill is "proof" that off-shore oil drilling is disastrous.

AB 23 was the remedy California has needed: a boon to state coffers, an increase in local industry and employment, and the promise of environmental protection. It was an oil-drilling proposal that even local environmental groups, such as the Environmental Defense Center based in Santa Barbara, supported. Regardless of the support it garnered from Sacramento and Santa Barbara, the Assembly rejected the bill on a partisan vote.

What occurred next on the vote of AB 23 was unbelievable. Moments after the bill was defeated, Assembly Majority Leader Alberto Torrico rose to ask that the vote be expunged. "Expunging" a vote means it is erased from the record. This practice is illegal in the California Senate but for some reason is allowed in the Assembly. Those who voted against the bill do not want you to know how they voted so the officially recorded vote just disappeared. Why did numerous Assembly members vote to hide their vote on AB 23? So much for accountability, so much for transparency, so much for standing up and being counted.

We need the revenue that this bill promised and we need it now. At the same time, we also need Assembly members to stop trying to hide behind political maneuverings that are deceptive and unethical.