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Assembly California Legislature



PEDRO NAVA
 ASSEMBLYMEMBER, THIRTY-FIFTH DISTRICT

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 - CHAIR, JOINT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY SERVICES AND HOMELAND SECURITY
 - APPROPRIATIONS
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COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA
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August 25, 2008

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
 Address: 105 E. Anapamu St.
 Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dear Honorable Members of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors:

Last week, a Legislative Resolution I authored to oppose offshore oil drilling passed the California State Assembly. We must fight to keep the federal moratorium on offshore oil drilling intact so as to not jeopardize our coastline, tourism and fishing industries. That's why I am so concerned with an action scheduled before the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, August 26, 2008.

You are scheduled to vote on whether or not change a long standing policy regarding offshore oil drilling. Your staff report goes so far as to submit a proposed letter to the Governor asking for a change in policy. The Governor has already expressed his opposition to offshore oil drilling. One has to ask why you are even considering such a request.

The Santa Barbara County staff letter makes assertions about offshore oil drilling that are factually inaccurate and therefore misleading.

Some examples:

FALSE:

The letter claims that because of improved technology, "there have been no significant spills in offshore production in the almost forty years since the [Santa Barbara oil] spill."

TRUTH:

Of the 40 offshore oil spills exceeding 42,000 gallons since 1964, 13 have occurred within the last 10 years. According to conservative estimates from the United States Mineral Management Service, during hurricane Katrina 470,000 gallons of oil from 70 separate wells polluted the ocean and during hurricane Rita more than 1 million gallons were spilled from offshore rigs from 54 separate spills. Drilling in the ocean always carries with it the risk of a catastrophe.

FALSE:

The letter says that oil "extraction reduces pressure that causes seeps to occur, thereby reducing the amount of oil and gas that is introduced in the water and air."

TRUTH:

This misstatement is based on assertions from a pro drilling group that receives contributions from the oil industry called "Stop Oil Seeps" or SOS. SOS bases their claims on a 1999 study published in the Journal of Geophysical Research. One of the authors of the study, Bruce Luyendyk recently told the Wall Street Journal that the group is "extrapolating these results in ways that are not justified."

FALSE:

Another and perhaps the most egregious falsehood in the letter is that "an indication that we are pursuing increased oil extraction would immediately have a depressing effect on the international price of oil, to the benefit of our country."

TRUTH:

This assertion lacks any merit or factual basis. We have seen the price of oil drop in recent months for a variety of reasons none of which are the result of calls by the Bush Administration to lift the offshore moratorium. Santa Barbara County's willingness to put our coastal environment at risk will not lower prices. Santa Barbara's onshore and offshore oil production totals about 3.2 million barrels a year. That represents one one-hundredth of one percent of world oil production. Anticipation about an increase in Santa Barbara's oil production, even a substantial increase, would be miniscule compared to the precipitous drop we have seen in oil prices resulting from decreased oil and gas demand over the last month and a half (\$21 per barrel since July 11th).

Even if additional oil drilling were allowed in our channel, there is no guarantee the oil would remain in this country. It would be sold to the highest bidder, for example China or India. Oil producing states like Alaska and Texas have not seen a drop in price at the pump. Despite being the second largest oil producer in the nation, Alaska pays the highest gasoline prices per gallon in the country and in Texas, the largest oil producing state, gas prices are around \$4 per gallon.

Making such a significant change in our county's policy regarding offshore oil drilling should at least be based on accuracy and fact, not hysteria and conjecture.

Promoting increased offshore oil drilling will require additional oversight and environmental protection by the County of Santa Barbara. We only need to look at how the County has managed on-shore oil drilling by Greka to ask ourselves why we should believe the public will be protected from the hazards of offshore oil drilling.

I appreciate your attention to this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance to you in the future.

Sincerely,



PEDRO NAVA
Assemblymember, 35th District
Chair, Joint Legislative Committee on Emergency Services and Homeland Security