

The Threat of Offshore Drilling and the Need for a Permanent Federal Ban
Testimony of Billy Keyserling, Mayor of Beaufort, South Carolina
House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
October 14, 2020

Seismic testing and offshore drilling outside of the boundaries we regulate, is one of those national issues which affect communities who can be deeply affected by decisions that impact local jurisdictions. So I would first like to thank the committee for reaching out to listen to local officials who are on the ground, where the rubber hits the road and where we are deeply impacted by decisions outside of our control.

South Carolina and in fact the entire eastern seaboard are very special assets to our nation which we enjoy and have built economies around protecting them as part of our health and commerce. We have built businesses and many local constituencies that rely on them as critically important of our natural lifestyles and the backbone of businesses that feed our people. While we recognize the need for uniformity, we realize and appreciate your committee and particularly Congressman Cunningham for taking the lead to protect our treasures and our dinner tables.

If this was an issue of national defense or in the nation's best interest, we might take a more moderate course. But exploration is not such an issue as use of fossil fuels is dropping, we have plenty of reserves and are likely not going to need more than we have. So, we asked ourselves, why would we accept a useless threat to our community, our visitors and our businesses who are drawn to the assets of our natural environment that would be put at risk?

As demonstrated by our local governmental resolutions opposing the initial Obama five year plan, I am proud that the city council of our small city of Beaufort took the lead in passing the first resolution against testing and drilling and then worked with other Mayors and their City and County Councils to join us not only in our state but along the eastern seaboard to fight the proposal. We are unified in purpose and committed to fighting this effort until the end.

We got some reprieve when the Obama Administration removed testing and drilling from their five-year plan. Unfortunately, the following Administration reinserted it leaving communities, businesses and families in limbo about our future. Do we make the investments in infrastructure required to upgrade access to and protection these resources when our investments can be for naught because these assets we rely on could be devastated.

Notwithstanding, the current "moratorium" which was imposed, but can be eliminated with no notice of no public input, we are in limbo and not ready to stop the fight.

As I understand it, as one of several municipal plaintiffs is collaborative court filings with other organizations, it appears that pending testing permits are immune from the order and still moving through the process notwithstanding what we anticipate as an election year moratorium. We are ready willing and able to continue this fight until there is a permanent solution satisfactory to our concerns.

Our citizens are grateful to Congressman Cunningham and your Committee for listening and acting based on rhetoric and industry pressure, but rather on scientific data, the marketplace and the peoples' will. But your work is incomplete until the Senate acts on the legislation you passed and they seem to be sitting on without action with the term coming to an end.

The time is now to engage the Senate to move this measure forward so that with certainty our industries can move forward to improve and continue to celebrate and preserve our naturally pristine environment while saving and in fact increasing jobs to continue the work on which we have invested for years and will invest in for years to come.