

COMMENTARY

Offshore oil drilling bills threaten California again

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The U.S. House of Representatives has passed three bills to expand offshore oil drilling. One bill, H.R. 1231, targets the Arctic, the East Coast and California, including Santa Barbara Channel areas adjacent to the marine sanctuaries.

Given the financial difficulties that the average American family is experiencing, the average consumer might say, "Sure, why not! Anything to lower the price of gas!"

But the suggestion that increased offshore oil drilling will have an effect on the price of gas at the pump is a lie the oil industry casts and many people swallow. Most energy experts agree that the current rise in gasoline prices is not a result of shortages but rather due to speculation in the international futures market.

The U.S. has 2 percent of the world's oil reserves. We consume 25 percent of the world's oil. We can't drill our way out of that problem. And the idea of endangering the beauty of the channel's coast or that of the Arctic for the paltry amount of oil that new leases would produce seems stupidly shortsighted. Unless one works for

an oil company and has the potential for a huge bonus for making it happen, or a member of Congress is looking for campaign money to fund reelection.

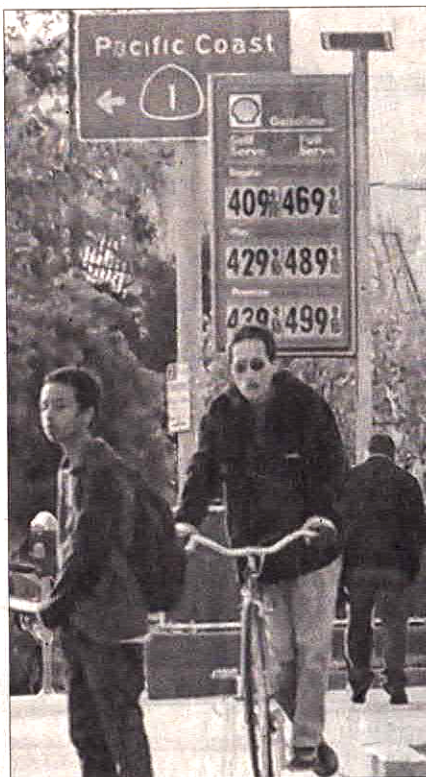
And we're not just talking aesthetics here. Statistics from the California Travel and Tourism Commission report that total direct travel spending in California was \$95.1 billion in 2010, a 7.5 percent increase from 2009 spending.

Travel spending in California directly supported 873,000 jobs, with earnings of \$29.9 billion. Travel spending in 2010 generated \$2.1 billion in local taxes and \$4.0 billion in state taxes.

California tourism is coastal dependent.

Therefore, California should not be asked to risk experiencing the kind of impacts to our economy that Gulf Coast residents recently experienced due to the BP oil spill. It is still unknown how long it will take for full recovery to their economy.

One thing we learned from the 1969 Santa Bar-



Pedestrians and a bicyclist pass signs advertising the price of self-serve gasoline at well over \$4 per gallon for all grades at a Shell station in the Pacific Palisades area. With a gallon of gas recently topping \$4 in many parts of the country, several bills are working their way through the U.S. House of Representatives that would expand offshore oil and gas drilling in many parts of the country, including off the Southern California coast.

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bara spill is that even a relatively smaller spill can devastate the local economy and take years to overcome.

How we work ourselves out from behind the eight-ball of our current petroleum-based transportation system and overwhelming reliance on private vehicles is a challenge that a forward-looking state like

California has the intestinal fortitude to meet.

Let us again congratulate ourselves that Californians voted in a solid majority last November to defeat the Texas-oil-money-funded Proposition 23, which would have dismantled the state's groundbreaking renewables portfolios.

As recently as last

month, UC Santa Barbara's Institute for Energy Efficiency hosted a conference on the SunShot initiative — a challenge sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy to decrease the cost of solar energy to \$1 per watt, or to the point where it can compete with gas, coal and oil without subsidies. (It would be a significant shift in Congress if the \$4 billion in oil industry subsidies were eliminated and though the subjects are related, I won't go further in that direction.)

Energy efficiency is always in fashion, if not exactly sexy. New cars will get better mileage. People will drive less. Beyond that, with the renewables portfolios in place, electrical generation will gradually transition toward alternative energy. Biodiesel and compressed natural gas will gradually aid in the trucking industry.

Eventually, electric cars powered by photovoltaic panels will be a reality. That new world is coming and California is leading the way and dragging the rest of the country with it.

While it gradually unfolds, let us remember the passion that fueled the Proposition 20 campaign in 1972, as a result

of the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill and other numerous threats to the California coast. Though now stretching a good ways back into our collective memory, the strength of that initiative created legislation that has been used as a model for coastal protection worldwide. It has helped to prevent new oil drilling off our coast for more than 40 years.

With the goal of educating young people on that achievement, Earth Alert is producing a short documentary on the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill and the democratic response that it inspired. Copies of raw footage will ultimately be donated to area universities' archives. Free public presentations will be made next fall and the documentary will be made available free to teachers.

Is the story too often told? Emphatically not. Young people who will soon inherit this planet must believe that the extraction industries can be controlled, or they will not bother to try. As a staple, cynicism provides no nourishment.

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