

Offshore Drilling Issue Network

Given its polarizing nature and place in the public eye, the Senate debate over drilling in the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) has many actors involved. These actors are not just concerned with whether to allow drilling off the coast or not, but which regions to allow drilling in, what the role of states should be, and how far close to shore to allow drilling. Other peripheral issues have also been attached to OCS drilling in the Senate, including alternative energy development, nuclear energy, and whether to repeal a royalty relief tax break for oil companies already drilling off the coast. Some of the key actors are listed below (non-governmental actors first), along with a brief description of why the issue is important to them and what resources they have to influence decision-making. This is followed by a paragraph describing the relevant action channels.

Oil Industry: Oil companies are, unsurprisingly, among the biggest proponents of offshore drilling. They list many benefits of drilling in the OCS, including less reliance on politically unstable oil-producing countries, more jobs from domestic production, and lower gas prices.¹ The industry's strongest motive, though, is the potential for profit. More areas to lease means more opportunities to make money. Oil companies are pushing for complete lifting of the moratorium, allowing them to drill within 50 miles of the coast- where they claim most of the country's known oil reserves are.² The industry has many resources, in the form of access to and influence over members of Congress. The oil and gas industry has contributed \$24.5 million to campaigns so far in the 2008 election cycle (most of it to Republicans).³ The American Petroleum Institute, the principle oil industry lobby, spent \$4 million in 2007 and has spent nearly \$3 million in the first half of 2008 on lobbying in Washington, receiving the attention of a variety of legislators and federal agencies.⁴

Environmental Groups: Most environmental groups oppose any kind of offshore drilling, although several have supported proposals that increase alternative energy development and energy conservation

along with more drilling.⁵ They argue that offshore drilling would present a high risk of polluting oceans and coastlines while doing little to meet the country's energy needs.⁶ Besides trying to influence policy in environmentally beneficial ways, these groups are also interested in maintaining their organizations. Environmental groups will be expected to take a stand on such a visible issue by their members, and satisfying members helps organizations continue to receive donations and expand membership. Environmental groups are also busy in Washington- they have a strong lobbying presence and have donated \$2 million to various campaigns so far during this election cycle, although that money came from groups representing many diverse causes.⁷

Business Interests: The National Association of Manufacturers, a lobby for business interests, favors increased domestic oil production, including offshore production.⁸ More offshore development will produce more jobs and economic growth, which are two of the NAM's major goals. Manufacturing and other business interests generally have a large amount of influence over elected officials, and the industry has so far made campaign contributions of \$21 million this year.⁹

Nuclear & Alternative Energy Industries: Although not directly concerned with oil production, these industries still have a stake in the issue. The main provision in the Gang of 10 proposal calls for increased offshore oil leasing, but the senators also advocate incentives for alternative energy development and a stronger emphasis on nuclear energy production.¹⁰ These proposals would energize the nuclear and alternative fuels industries. Both groups are lobbying in Washington, although they have a substantially smaller presence than the oil and gas industry.¹¹

Democratic Leadership: Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) and Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) control the agenda in the Senate and House, respectively, and also have a strong influence over their fellow Democrats' stances on key issues. Both did not allow drilling bills to be voted on through most of the summer, continuing their party's traditional opposition to OCS drilling. Pelosi represents California, a state that

has been staunchly anti-drilling since the disastrous 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill. She has supported the OCS moratorium since she entered Congress in 1987.¹² Reid comes from Nevada, a state rich in potential alternative energy resources and the home of Yucca Mountain, an unfinished nuclear waste storage facility that Reid vehemently opposes because of safety risks.¹³ So Reid has reason to support alternative energy projects and oppose further nuclear development that might lead to more waste being transported into or through his state in the future. Both Pelosi and Reid have been more open to expanded drilling in recent weeks, in part because of an increase in support for drilling from their constituents and those of their colleagues.

Republican Leadership: Republican leaders in both houses of Congress, Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Rep. John Boehner (R-OH) made strong pushes to end the drilling moratorium during the 110th. Both congressmen introduced bills to allow more offshore leasing and as well as the processing of oil shale on public lands.^{14,15} These are issues that have long been part of the Republican agenda, although McConnell and Boehner have less power to address them now that Congress is controlled by Democrats. McConnell demanded a vote on an offshore drilling bill for most of the summer, but could do nothing to actually get a bill considered. Still, the leadership does have influence over how congressional Republicans vote.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman: Bingaman (D-NM) is a key player in the offshore drilling debate. As chair of the Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) committee, he controls the agenda of the Senate committee most relevant to the issue. Bingaman is a strong proponent of energy conservation, tax incentives for renewable energy development, and repealing royalty relief for offshore drilling.^{16,17,18} Bingaman has shown limited support for expanding offshore drilling,¹⁹ especially once the idea gained acceptance with the Democratic leadership. Bingaman's motives have been shaped by his personal convictions and his party's stance on the issue, but also probably by his campaign contributors. Two of his top three

contributors are energy providers, both of which are expanding into renewable energy. His state is also the home of Los Alamos National Laboratory, a nuclear research facility that has contributed to his campaign.²⁰ He therefore may have extra incentive to support the nuclear and alternative energy industries. The ranking member of the ENR committee, Pete Domenici (R-NM), supports expanded drilling but is retiring.

Gang of 10: The Gang of 10, is a bipartisan group of senators that came together to try to draft compromise energy legislation. They propose to expand offshore drilling leasing in the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic, eliminate royalty relief for oil companies, promote alternative and nuclear energy, and increase fuel efficiency standards. The leaders of the group are Kent Conrad (D-ND) and Saxby Chambliss (R-GA).¹⁰ A group comprised of so many senators from both parties has many interests and possible motives for being involved in such an effort. But regardless of motives, the group has significant resources. Its bipartisan nature gives the group instant credibility with both parties. Because the proposals will be viewed as attempts at compromise to satisfy both sides, they will be more likely to garner consideration than partisan bills.

Sens. Diane Feinstein & Barbara Boxer: Feinstein (D-CA) and Boxer (D-CA) represent a state that has traditionally been staunchly anti-offshore drilling, they and are two of the most vocal opponents of lifting the moratorium. Besides the views of their constituents, the senators are also undoubtedly looking to protect California's booming tourist industry and its fisheries, worth \$43 billion a year.²¹ Environmental groups also comprise one of Boxer's top 20 campaign donors,²² giving her more of an incentive to take a strong environmental stance. Although neither Feinstein or Boxer sit on the ENR committee, they still hold sway in the Senate. Boxer is the chair of the Environment and Public Works committee, and Feinstein chairs the Rules and Administration committee.²³ This gives them limited bargaining power over senators in other committees.

Sens. Bill Nelson & Mel Martinez: Nelson (D-FL) and Martinez (R-FL) are in a similar position to that of Feinstein and Boxer. Florida, like California, relies heavily on tourism- an industry that could potentially be damaged by oil spills.²⁴ Martinez, a Republican, supports drilling in ANWR and oil shale production, but opposes oil exploration off Florida's coast.²⁵ His stance is shaped by a complex combination of national party politics and local interests. Nelson opposes drilling in the OCS and in ANWR. He says he will filibuster any bill brought to the Senate floor that would allow drilling off the Florida coast.²⁶ The ability to hold up the Senate is a powerful resource, one that Nelson could probably pull off politically because of the support he has on this issue from his constituents.

State Governments: The governments of coastal states are also important players in this debate. California, Maine, New Jersey, and Maryland governors all are opposed to expanded drilling off their coasts.²⁷ Virginia, Georgia, and Florida (despite its senators' opposition) are more open to the idea though.² These state governments can all influence legislation through their own senators.

The key action channel for this issue is the ENR committee. Any bill involving OCS drilling will be sent to this committee, where it will either be considered and eventually passed along to the full Senate or simply discarded. The full Senate is another, secondary action channel, but a decision can only be made on the floor if the ENR committee allows it. Of the actors mentioned here, Jeff Bingaman has the best access to the action channel. In fact, as the chair of the ENR committee, he effectively controls the action channel and what decisions will be made. Several members of the Gang of 10 and Mel Martinez of Florida are members of the committee, giving them direct access to the action channel. Members of the Senate who are not part of this committee only have indirect access to this channel, limited to the extent that they have influence over the committee members. Non-government actors also have limited access to this action channel, based on their ability to influence committee members through lobbying and campaign contributions.

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