

Senator Maria Cantwell

Press Conference to Introduce West Coast Drilling Moratorium

May 12, 2010

Thank you. I am pleased to join my colleagues today and I want to thank very much Senator Boxer for her leadership on this important legislation. Her record has been a long one of championing the environment and her leadership on the EPW committee speaks volumes about her commitment to the coastline of her state.

And I'm proud to be here with my colleagues Senator Feinstein and Senator Merkley. You're right – Washingtonians, Oregonians and Californians are speaking loud and clear today: "We do not want drilling off our coasts."

President Bush and Congress made a mistake in 2008 by letting a 20 year ban on drilling off the coast of Washington expire.

Back then, "drill, baby, drill" was a very popular rallying cry, as my colleague just said. And even though we tried to point out that offshore drilling would never lower gas prices or impact our foreign dependence on oil, people still wanted to go ahead.

Now, with the horrific oil rig accident continuing to unfold before us in the Gulf, it is all too clear to the majority of our constituents that we were right all along in opposing offshore drilling. We must act to safeguard our precious coastal lines and end the dangerous addiction to fossil fuels.

It just doesn't make sense to drill in some parts of our country. And President Obama recognized that when he left out the West Coast in his recent announcement for plans for oil and gas development on the Outer Continental Shelf:

The Department of Interior describes the Pacific Outer Continental Shelf like this:

“Over much of the Pacific Outer Continental Shelf there is low available resource potential, low interest from the oil and gas industry. There is consistent opposition from the public, the State, and Members of Congress in the region for expanded offshore development at this time.”

The Interior Department’s assessment is spot on. And here are just a few reasons why we need to prevent drilling off the state of Washington:

- The offshore geography is deep and the weather is wild. It is dangerous and a unwelcome environment for a drilling rig.
- Commercial and recreational fishing in Washington fisheries supports over 16,000 jobs and generates over \$500 million dollars annually. An oil spill would put that in jeopardy.
- Our marine resources are an important source of protein and an essential component of the oceans and the food web. And our Pacific Salmon and Orca whale population are priceless icons to us.
- Our beautiful coastline, similar to here, what we see in California, is characterized by remote beaches that are very difficult to protect. And many long stretches of the ecologically sensitive shoreline are already now protected, like the National Wildlife Refuges and the Olympic National Park.
- And finally, the coastline is seismically active, susceptible to earthquakes and tsunamis. The nightmare scenario is a natural disaster that not only causes a serious oil spill, but knocks out our response capability at the same time.

Some may ask why this bill is even necessary then? Even if we could safely tap all the oil off Washington's shores, it would power our nation's oil addiction for less than one month. With such low resource potential and high challenges, the Northwest has attracted little interest from the oil industry.

But Washington state fishermen want certainty. Coastal tourist spots want certainty. My constituents want certainty. They never want an oil rig to blow up and kill Washington workers and then continue to spew oil while executives point the finger on whose to blame. And there's little support for continuing to survey that area for potential oil and gas at taxpayers' expense.

So it is simply important that we put forth this legislation today. The West coast has long been a leader in low carbon alternatives. We shouldn't become part of the problem; we should become part of the solution.

And done right, the transition to increase our national security and protect our environment and create millions of jobs, is to get off our addiction to oil and pursue other avenues.

So I'm glad to be here with my colleagues today and I'm certainly glad that our colleague from Oregon, Senator Merkley, has joined us in this effort.

###