



[Drilling Bits of Fiction](#)

Seven experts say the White House distorted their views

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Wall Street Journal Editorial

The Obama Administration is under political pressure to reverse its ill-considered deep water drilling moratorium, and the latest blowback comes from seven angry experts from the National Academy of Engineering who say their views were distorted to justify the ban.

In the wake of the oil spill, President Obama asked Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to produce a report on new drilling safety recommendations. Then on May 27 Mr. Obama announced a six-month deep water drilling ban, justifying it on the basis of Mr. Salazar's report, a top recommendation of which was the moratorium. To lend an air of technical authority, the report noted: "The recommendations contained in this report have been peer-reviewed by seven experts identified by the National Academy of Engineering."

That would be false, sir. In a scathing statement this week, the seven experts explained that the report draft they had reviewed did not include a six-month drilling moratorium. That was added only after they signed off. "The Secretary should be free to recommend whatever he thinks is correct, but he should not be free to use our names to justify his political decisions," wrote the seven in a letter to Gulf Coast politicians.

The seven noted that they broadly agreed with the report and had even signed off on a proposal to suspend new deep water permits for six months. They also agreed to a "temporary pause" in drilling to perform additional testing on the Gulf's 33 deep water wells that have already received permits to drill.

But as for a "blanket moratorium," the seven said it "is not the answer. It will not measurably reduce risk further and it will have a lasting impact on the nation's economy which may be greater than that of the oil spill." If anything, the ban could prove "counterproductive to long term safety."

One of the seven, University of California at Berkeley engineering professor Bob Bea, further explained in an email cited in the New Orleans Times-Picayune: "Moratorium was not a part" of the "report we consulted-advised-reviewed. Word from [the Department of Interior] was it was a [White House] request." In other words, the drilling ban is a West Wing political invention designed to make the boss look tough on oil companies. Our guess is that the credit goes to energy czar Carol Browner, who has been loudly touting the ban to show the Administration is doing something.

Mr. Obama has said he's open to rescinding the ban earlier if new safety recommendations

could be implemented sooner. But he has punted that question to the commission he appointed to investigate the spill, which isn't even fully staffed and has six months to report its findings. That will arrive too late for thousands of Gulf residents who are at risk of losing their jobs within weeks as deep water rigs prepare to leave the Gulf. As a tacit admission of the damage it is causing, the White House is now saying it expects BP to cover the wages of workers affected by its own politicized moratorium.

Americans don't blame Mr. Obama for the oil spill, but they are beginning to doubt the competence of a President whose decisions suggest political panic more than careful policy. In their letter, the seven experts encouraged Mr. Salazar to "overcome emotion with logic" and rethink the ban. That's good political advice too.

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