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Obama Blocks New Energy Exploration

By Rep. Doc Hastings

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With 9.5 percent of Americans out of work and rumors of yet another costly stimulus, President Obama and White House officials regularly say that "nothing is off the table" when it comes to getting our economy back on track.

But after six months in office, President Obama should revise his statement to reflect his Administration's unspoken policy that "nothing is off the table – except for the creation of many types of energy jobs."

Although the President regularly expresses verbal support for a comprehensive energy plan, his Administration has demonstrated that no matter how many Americans are out of work, it will continue to take steps to proactively discourage certain types of economic development – including the creation of natural gas jobs, oil drilling jobs and nuclear jobs.

Today – July 14, 2009 – epitomizes the Administration's prejudice against job creation and expanded employment for Americans in the oil and natural gas industry. Exactly a year ago, President Bush issued an executive order lifting the ban on offshore oil and natural gas drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) and opened the door for new energy production and the creation of millions of new energy jobs in our country. But today, a defacto ban remains in place only because the Obama Administration has actively blocked the new 5-year leasing program which would open areas for offshore exploration and development.

The Administration's decision has prevented Americans from enjoying 1.2 million new, well-paying jobs annually across the country and \$70 billion in additional wages each year (source: American Energy Alliance). And it also prevents the federal government from receiving over \$2.2 trillion in total tax receipts – revenue that would go a long way towards addressing the historic \$1.8 trillion deficit that reportedly keeps the President awake at night.

In addition to obstructing the creation of future American energy jobs, the Administration is also eliminating current energy jobs. On February 4th, the Interior Department withdrew areas offered for 77 oil and gas leases in Utah that thousands of Utah citizens were depending on for employment. When Deputy Secretary of the Interior David Hayes traveled to Utah recently to attempt to explain this decision, he got an earful from local residents. As the Salt Lake Tribune reported on May 27th, “a hostile crowd of about 500 oil and gas field workers and their families gathered in the Western Park Museum auditorium. Their message: Halting those leases on 103,000 acres...meant lost jobs, hungry kids and a lack of commitment to energy independence.”

Environmentalists may cheer the Administration’s obstructionism as a victory against “Big Oil” but the truth is that fewer drilling leases equal lost jobs, higher unemployment, a higher national deficit, and increased dependence on foreign oil.

Unfortunately, after all of these decisions, the Obama Administration’s quiet campaign against oil, gas and nuclear jobs hasn’t gotten much national press coverage. Instead, Americans read about President Obama’s efforts to create new green jobs. I appreciate and support efforts to create more green jobs – but the truth is that the federal government should make it easier for the 14.7 million unemployed Americans to find all kinds of energy jobs - including nuclear jobs, offshore drilling jobs, green jobs and manufacturing jobs. When unemployed moms and dads across our country are trying to put food on the table for their family, they don’t have the luxury of waiting for the most politically popular form of employment.

Republicans believe there is a better path forward for our country that will help more Americans get back to work, reduce carbon emissions, protect the environment and make the United States more energy independent.

We have proposed an “all-of-the-above” energy plan that responsibly uses our natural resources to create new energy and make our environment cleaner. In June, we introduced the American Energy Act (H.R. 2846) to encourage development of renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar, hydropower, nuclear and biomass, while also producing more American-made oil and natural gas.

As President Obama and Democrats in Congress consider how to prevent double digit unemployment, they should finally drop their National Energy Tax bill and support a comprehensive energy plan that encourages the creation of all types of American energy jobs.

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