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President Obama’s offshore drilling plan must be replaced

By: House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings
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While the American people and news media were distracted by the Supreme Court’s decision on Obamacare, the Obama Administration quietly released its final proposed offshore drilling plan for the next five years.

Though President Obama uses lofty rhetoric to claim support for American oil and natural gas production, the administration chose to bury the announcement of this plan under mountains of news coverage. It’s no surprise that during an election year the president doesn’t want to hype a plan that represents a giant step backwards for American energy production and keeps 85 percent of our offshore areas off-limits.

Fortunately, Congress now has the responsibility to act and make clear that the president’s plan is inadequate to meet the United States’ energy needs. Under current law, the president must submit the five-year plan to Congress for a mandatory 60-day review before it goes into effect. While in the past, this 60-day review has been treated as just a formality, it is an opportunity to reject the president’s plan and offer a better alternative for job creation and energy production.

H.R. 6082, the Congressional Replacement of President Obama’s Energy-Restricting and Job-Limiting Offshore Drilling Plan, would replace President Obama’s plan with an environmentally responsible, robust plan that supports new offshore drilling. This plan passed out of the House Natural Resources Committee with bipartisan support and will be considered by the full House this week. It sets up a clear choice between the president’s drill-nowhere-new plan and the Congressional replacement plan to responsibly expand offshore American energy production.

President Obama’s plan doesn’t open one new area for leasing and energy production. The Atlantic Coast, the Pacific Coast and most of the water off Alaska are all placed off-limits. This is especially frustrating for Virginians who had a lease sale scheduled for 2011, only to

have it canceled by President Obama. The president added further insult to injury by not including the Virginia lease sale in his final plan, meaning the earliest it could happen is late 2017.

The president's plan only offers 15 lease sales limited to the Gulf of Mexico and, very late in the plan, small parts of Alaska. It doesn't open one new area for leasing and energy production. According to the non-partisan Congressional Research Service, President Obama's 15 lease sales represent the lowest number ever included in an offshore leasing plan. President Obama rates worse than even Jimmy Carter.

Thanks to President Obama, it's as if the bipartisan steps to lift the drilling moratoria in 2008 never happened. Crippling \$4 gasoline prices sparked Americans' outrage and pressured the Democrat-controlled Congress to allow legislation to pass opening up new offshore areas to drilling. Unfortunately, four years later, American families and small businesses are experiencing the pain of higher gasoline prices and yet no progress has been made to expand production of our offshore resources. The Congressional moratorium on drilling has simply been replaced by the "Obama moratorium" on drilling.

Gasoline prices were \$1.89 when President Obama took office, and prices today are nearly double. Americans will continue to face volatile price spikes as long as we continue to keep the United States' energy resources under lock-and-key.

In stark contrast to the president, the Congressional replacement plan includes 29 lease sales and opens new areas previously under moratoria. It's a targeted effort towards those areas where we know we have the most oil and natural gas resources – like the mid-Atlantic, the Southern California Coast and Alaska. This is a drill smart plan that would create thousands of new American jobs, help lower prices at the pump and strengthen our national and economic security.

Congress has a choice – to either support the president's plan that re-imposes the drilling moratorium and places the vast majority of offshore areas off-limits, or support using American energy to create American jobs and strengthen America's economy.

The House is prepared to act this week and the Senate must follow suit. If Congress does nothing during this 60-day review period, it's a tacit endorsement of the president's plan. It's an endorsement for no-new-American-energy and no-new-American-jobs. Congress should not shrink from its responsibilities during this time and should send a loud and clear message to President Obama that his offshore energy plan is unacceptable and we can do better.

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