

Florida Delegation Pushes to End Oil Drilling Off Florida Coast

By

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Kathy Castor and Vern Buchanan

Several members of the Florida congressional delegation teamed up on Tuesday to unveil a proposal permanently banning oil drilling off the coast of Florida in the Gulf.

Florida Democrat U.S. Reps. Kathy Castor and Charlie Crist and Florida Republican U.S. Reps. Vern Buchanan and Francis Rooney brought out the “Florida Coastal Protection Act” which would make the current moratorium on oil drilling, which ends in 2022, permanent.

Castor is the chief sponsor of the bill which she also championed in the last Congress. She heads up the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis.

“Here in Florida, we are keenly aware of the devastating impacts of oil and gas drilling off our shores,” Castor said. “Our state’s vital natural resources – and our state’s economy – cannot risk the devastation brought by blowouts, nor can it afford the high costs of carbon pollution. We have an obligation to act now to protect our beautiful Florida coastline, our economy and our future – and I am proud to have my colleagues from Florida... join me.

“It is vital that we act now on the changing climate and the extreme weather events. By prohibiting oil drilling off Florida’s coast, we will also prevent dangerous carbon pollution,” Castor continued. “Here in Tampa Bay and throughout Florida, we see rising tidal levels and temperatures, sunny day flooding, disappearing corals and longer mosquito seasons. These are the real everyday impacts of climate change that my neighbors are experiencing, and which carbon pollution engenders. We must not exacerbate the climate crisis, but instead take actions like extending the moratorium to solve it. The Tampa Bay region’s 4 million residents live in a region that is ranked as the country’s most vulnerable metropolitan area to storm surge with \$175 billion in potential losses. Clearly its coastal infrastructure is already vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events.

“The climate change, environmental and economic reasons to prohibit drilling off Florida’s coasts are perhaps the most pressing. However, of vital importance also is ending the threat this drilling presents to our national security: the Gulf is a vital training area for our military,” Castor continued. “The Department of Defense has stated clearly that the area continues to be a strategic national asset critical to our weapon systems and the readiness of our service members.”

“The moratorium currently in place protects waters up to 235 miles off the west coast of Florida from oil drilling and will expire in June 2022 unless made permanent by the bipartisan bill,” Buchanan’s office noted. “Florida has experienced the devastating impacts of offshore oil drilling following the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster, and several other spills currently happening throughout the middle and western Gulf, like the Taylor spill.”

Buchanan, one of the current co-chairs of the state delegation, offered his take on the legislation.

“Allowing drilling off of Florida’s pristine coasts would be a colossal mistake,” Buchanan said. “Red tide has already plagued the Sunshine State – it would be imprudent to invite the potential for another catastrophic oil spill that would devastate Florida’s economy and environment. As co-chair of the Florida congressional delegation, I will continue working with colleagues in both parties to protect the state’s beautiful coasts and waters.”

While drilling is banned in state waters, the Florida Coastal Protection Act would extend it to federal waters.

“The people of Florida are clearly opposed to offshore drilling,” Rooney said. “The November 2018 ballot contained a ban on offshore drilling, Amendment 9, which won with over 68 percent in favor. This widespread support is a clear indication that voters are overwhelmingly in support of Florida coastal protection. As Floridians, we are well aware that our livelihood depends on a pristine environment.”

“Florida voters spoke clearly in November: no drilling off our coasts. Our job is to be their voice in Washington, sending that same message loud and clear with this bill to block harmful drilling and exploration off of Florida. We cannot afford another disaster devastating our waters, health, and economy,” Crist insisted.