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Obama Admin Warned by NOAA It Was Underestimating Offshore Drilling Risks-- To Be Expected Given Big Money



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By Rob Kall ([about the author](#)) Page 1 of 1 page(s)

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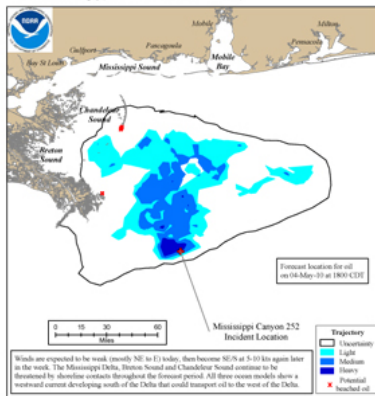
image from Moveon.org ad calling for stop to all new offshore drilling

The admin was warned but it had a political agenda and a government infrastructure still primarily made up of Bush appointees who earned their jobs by blocking regulations

Trajectory Forecast Mississippi Canyon 252

NOAA/NOS/OR&R
Estimate for: 1800 CDT, Tuesday, 5/04/10
Date Prepared: 2300 CDT, Monday, 5/03/10

This forecast is based on the NWS spot forecast from Monday, May 3 PM. Currents were obtained from the NOAA Gulf of Mexico model, Texas A&M UCL&S and NCEP models. The model was initialized from SAR data obtained during a Transport Canada overflight Monday AM. The leading edge may contain turbidity that are not readily observable from the imagery (these not included in the model initialization).



When the Obama administration was developing its new policy on offshore drilling, it was warned by NOAA (National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration) officials that the risks were being underestimated, Dan Fromkin of the Huffingtonpost [reports](#),

NOAA is the nation's lead ocean resource agency, and the warnings came in [its response](#) to a [draft](#) of the Obama Administration's offshore oil drilling plans. The comments were [Web-published](#) in October by the whistle-blowing group, [Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility](#) (PEER).

But NOAA's views were largely [brushed aside](#) as Obama went ahead and [announced on March 31](#) that he would open vast swaths of American coastal waters to offshore drilling -- a plan now very much in doubt as a [blown-out BP well in the Gulf of Mexico](#) spews out an estimated 200,000 gallons of oil daily, for the 13th straight day.

NOAA also wrote that the administration's "analysis of the risk and impacts of accidental spills and chronic impacts are understated and generally not supported or referenced, using vague terms and phrases such as 'no substantive degradation is expected' and 'some marine mammals could be harmed.'"

The NOAA report challenged the administrations claims that leaks had been rare in recent years.

Froomkin cites PEER whistleblower group head, Jeff Ruch,

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action.kelly2010.com

that as in many other regulatory agencies, Obama political appointees in the Interior Department's [notoriously troubled](#) Minerals Management Service (MMS) have not taken enough steps to reverse the anti-environmental and anti-science policies of the Bush years.

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"For the most part, the Obama team is still the Bush team," Ruch told HuffPost, noting that beyond a thin layer of political appointees, offices like MMS are run by managers who were "promoted during the Bush years -- In many instances, promoted for basically violating the law. And from what we can tell, their conduct hasn't changed."

Furthermore, Ruch said, Obama "sees environmental issues as a political bargaining chip."

Indeed, Obama's decision to increase offshore drilling was widely seen as a way of [getting some Republican support](#) for the administration's climate change bill.

I interviewed Lawrence Lessig yesterday ([podcast here.](#)) He's working hard for serious campaign finance regulation that gets big money out of influencing politics-- specifically, the Fair Elections Now Act, described at [fixcongressfirst](#). Lessig cited some of the things Obama said that he has failed miserably at delivering on,

"If we do not change our politics -- if we do not fundamentally change the way Washington works -- then the problems we've been talking about for the last generation will be the same ones that haunt us for generations to come."

Or:

"So unless we're willing to challenge the broken system in Washington, and stop letting lobbyists use their clout to get their way, nothing else is going to change."

Or:

"If we're not willing to take up that fight, then real change -- change that will make a lasting difference in the lives of ordinary Americans -- will keep getting blocked by the defenders of the status quo."

And Lessig observed, in his [huffingpost article](#), "Somehow this Administration forgot to "take up that fight." Somehow it has allowed the enemy to become the second largest political party in America (Republicans) rather than the single most vilified profession (lobbyists, just below lawyers and used car dealers). Somehow Obama has been convinced that his promise of bold leadership was a mistake. Somehow he has come to believe that realistic if puny ideas are the ways of transformational presidents like Reagan and FDR. Yet somehow we have got to get this president to recognize that it was the "realism" of 2009 that was his mistake. What American democracy needs right now is leadership. It needs a President who shows us a way to restore our democracy. It needs the anger and impatience of the Republican Roosevelt (Teddy), railing against the corrupting influence of money in politics. "

The response to the SCOTUS Citizens United decision by Chuck Schumer is not enough. It only TELLS where the money comes from. The Fair Elections Now act takes power from the wealthy individuals and corporations and limits contributions to \$100, with the government matching that with \$400. This will take the top-down influence out of elections and make them the more bottom up, influence-free democratic processes that we-the-people deserve.

Lessig a former Stanford and now Harvard Attorney and internet philosopher luminary writes on many different topics on politics, but always comes back to this core problem. Undue money influences every aspect of our politics and government. If we are going to fix the environment or the banking system or health care, we must first get the money out of elections and politics. Obama promised he would do it, then dropped the ball. We need to make election reform the first priority or none of the other priorities will matter. I call for writers on OEN to take Lessig's approach and tie whatever issues you are covering to election reform.

Read the rest of Froomkin's article [here](#).

Rob Kall is executive editor, publisher and site architect of [OpEdNews.com](#). Host of the Rob Kall Bottom Up Radio Show (WNJC 1360 AM), President of [Futurehealth, Inc](#), ([more...](#))

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