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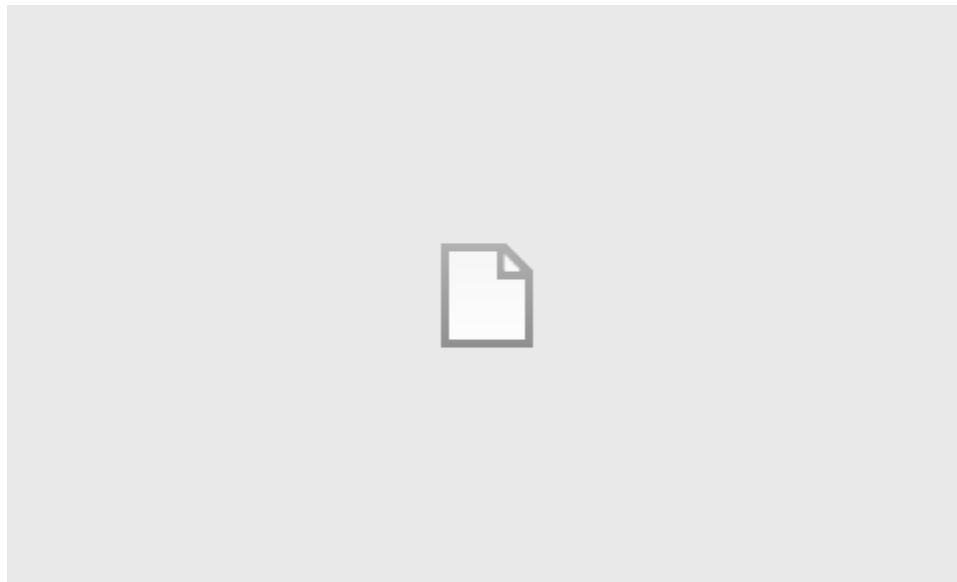


April 29, 2010, 4:21 pm

Florida Democrat Seeks Offshore Oil Hiatus

By [ANDREW C. REVKIN](#)

[Senator Bill Nelson](#), the Florida Democrat, has drafted legislation that would suspend the Obama administration's plan to move forward with offshore exploration and drilling for new oil deposits until a full investigation of the [Gulf of Mexico explosion and spill](#) is completed and new protocols developed to prevent future accidents of this sort. This is probably only the beginning, given that the oil has yet to reach coasts. Here's the draft language:



[Robert Brulle](#), a sociology professor at Drexel University who has long studied events that influence environmental policy, sees the potential in the Gulf for a game changer:

When you look at well blowouts, they can become the biggest spills of all time. They can run on for months. The biggest one in the Gulf was the [Ixtoc I](#) in 1979. This spill ran from June 1979 to March 1980 (9 months) and released 140 million gallons of oil. By

comparison, the Exxon Valdez (only!) released 10.8 million gallons.

This could have an enormous political impact. That type of spill size will eventually reach recreational areas, and places where the press can easily document the adverse impacts of the spill. Unlike global climate change, oil spills make for good graphic, and visual coverage, the causal sequence is self evident, and denial is impossible. Think of week after week of oil spill coverage on the nightly news. That is what happened with the Exxon Valdez, which occurred in a remote area. This will make opening up offshore drilling very difficult. Plus it is occurring in an area that is supportive of offshore drilling. When the adverse impacts start hitting the recreation industries of the Gulf coast, the politics could get very interesting.

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Christopher Yaun
Portsmouth NH
April 30th, 2010
4:54 am
The EARTH MATTERS

Heather and I were in New Orleans a few weeks ago and used a free day to drive to Grande Isle and Port Fourchon (pronounced Foo-shon). Crossing the bridge to leave the island we could see maybe 100 Brown Pelicans feeding in the bay and an occasional large splash. We almost drove on but curiosity got the better of us and we turned our rental around to investigate. Next to the 2 lane bridge is the remains of an old wooden bridge, what is left of it has been converted to a short fishing pier and there we found 3 families enjoying a lazy afternoon. The pelicans were all swimming and “bobbing” for fish. And to our surprise every few moments a Porpoise would stike at something we couldn’t see and were causing the splashes that had caught our attention. After watching for a long while we discovered that if we gazed without focusing, every few minutes we could see a Porpoise jump completely free of the water. The air time was so brief and the bay so large that we could not “see” the action using ordinary focus. I can only estimate from the “boiling” of the waters surface that there must have been hundreds of Porpoise feeding in the bay along with the Pelicans and 3 human families.

Port Fourchon is a huge story all by itself and I hope Joe or some qualified journalist would craft an article explaining its history and significance. In brief, 85% of the oil rigs located off the coast of Louisiana are serviced from Port Fourchon. I can only imagine that this sleepy port at the end of the road is overwhelmed with activity today.

The prevailing currents should carry the oil slick east and away from Grand Isle. The Porpoise and Pelicans and small fish there should be safe. But I imagine, farther east, uncounted populations of innocent Porpoise and Pelicans and other creatures will be destroyed by this man made disaster.

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


By 2050 or so, the world population is expected to reach nine billion, essentially adding two Chinas to the number of people alive today. Those billions will be seeking food, water and other resources on a planet where, scientists say, humans are already shaping climate and the web of life. In Dot Earth, which recently [moved from the news side of The Times](#) to the Opinion section, [Andrew C. Revkin](#) examines efforts to balance human affairs with the planet's limits. Conceived in part with support from a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, Dot Earth tracks relevant developments from suburbia to Siberia. The blog is an interactive exploration of trends and ideas with readers and experts.

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New Options Needed



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- [Africa's Energy Gap](#)
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The Arctic in Transition



Enshrined in history as an untouchable frontier, the Arctic is being transformed by significant warming, a rising thirst for oil and gas, and international tussles over shipping routes and seabed resources.

- [The Big Melt series](#)
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Society

Slow Drips, Hard Knocks



Human advancement can be aided by curbing everyday losses like the millions of avoidable deaths from indoor smoke and tainted water, and by increasing resilience in the face of predictable calamities like earthquakes and drought.

- [Times Topics: Disasters](#)
- [Thirsty Giant, India and water](#)
- [The Future of Calamity](#)

Biology

Life, Wild and Managed



Earth's veneer of millions of plant and animal species is a vital resource that will need careful tending as human populations and their demands for land, protein and fuels grow.

- [Managing Planet Earth](#)
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Slide Show



[A Planet in Flux](#)

Andrew C. Revkin began exploring the human impact on the environment nearly 30 years ago. An early stop was Papeete, Tahiti. This narrated slide show describes his extensive travels.

Video



[Dot Earth on YouTube](#)

Many of the videos featured here can be found on Andrew Revkin's channel on YouTube. Recent reader favorites:

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