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House of Representatives

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in opposition to the Deep Ocean Energy Resources Act (H.R. 4761). I fundamentally disagree with the premise of the Deep Ocean Energy Resources Act that more drilling, regardless of where it is, is the answer to energy independence.

I have read in the papers this week that this bill will be considered on the House floor as part of an "Energy week." Republicans would like to use this bill to claim that Democrats are not committed to ending our dependence on foreign oil or as a ruse to feign lowering gas prices before the July 4th holiday weekend. This is simply not true.

Just so we have the facts straight, today we are considering a bill that will immediately lift a twenty-five year moratorium on offshore drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf. This is the same twenty-five year moratorium that the House overwhelmingly voted in favor of continuing just a couple of weeks ago when we considered the Fiscal Year 2007 Interior Appropriations. The major difference between the two votes is that the Deep Ocean Energy Resources Act will give states an "opt out" option.

The so-called "opt out" option is alarming to me, because in truth, it is anything but giving states the authority to control what happens off their own coasts. In fact, what this bill does is first cut the moratoria area by 100 miles from state boundaries (current law establishes a boundary of 200 miles). Then the bill lifts the moratoria on drilling between 50-100 miles off a state boundary. Yes, many of my colleagues will assert that states then have the ability to "opt out" of offshore drilling leases. However, the complicated procedures outlined in the bill will actually make it difficult for states to use this "opt out" option and if they miss the deadline to file a petition, drilling can start immediately. My question for my colleagues who support this bill is: What happens if New Jersey is successful in opting out of new leasing but New York and Delaware decide to allow drilling. How can New Jersey coastal cities, businesses, and other interested parties be sure that accidents in neighboring states will not affect their industries?

Many of my colleagues today have talked at length about the costs of this bill. An estimate initially done by the Minerals Management Service (MMS) concluded that the bill would add \$69 billion to the federal budget deficit over the next fifteen years. CBO also estimates that the bill will cost taxpayers \$11 billion over the next ten years. I would hope that many of my colleagues who care deeply about the fiscal discipline of this Congress would see the hypocrisy in passing this bill.

I am most concerned with the bill's direct contravention of the National Environmental Policy Act provisions that promote environmentally friendly practices. Section 12 of this bill says that seismic air gun surveys and other exploratory leasing plans are exempt from preparing an Environmental Impact Statement before drilling can occur. The effects on our environment of seismic air gun surveys and other exploratory plans are well documented. Large blasts and seismic airgun arrays can cause severe damage to the hearing of many of the ocean wildlife that depend on hearing for survival in addition to the damage to the reefs and other ocean landscape. In 2004, the International Whaling Commission's Scientific Committee concluded that increased sound from seismic surveys was "cause for serious concern." Allowing lease sales to be exempt from NEPA is misguided policy.

For all these reasons I have outlined above, I urge my colleagues to vote against the Deep Ocean Energy Resources Act. I have said this before on the House floor and I believe it is worth saying again: drilling is not the answer to our energy concerns and until we in Congress work to promote energy conservation and sustainable energy supplies, we will continue on the same treacherous path we are on today.