

NEWS RELEASE

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KEY BUSINESS GROUP ADMITS OIL DRILLING IN FLORIDA WILL NOT LOWER PRICES AT PUMP

*HOUSE LEADERS ASK NO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SECRETIVE TEXAS GROUP
THAT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PUSH TO DRILL*

*AND IT IS CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT FROM THE FIRST CRITICAL LEGISLATIVE
HEARING*

TALLAHASSEE – It was a day of revelations as an important Florida House committee held its first hearing Wednesday on whether the state should consider opening state waters to drilling for oil.

A fleet of opponents — including hotel owners, government tourism officials, coastal city officials, an expert on the military's Gulf of Mexico needs, and a long list of state conservation groups — cited a litany of potential environmental risks to beaches and tourism, the state's primary economic engine.

“Oil rigs and pipelines next to the beach are not compatible with the state's efforts to protect our world class beaches,” said Gary Appelson, policy director of the Sea Turtle Survival League.

A Texas group that is said to be bankrolling the effort to persuade state lawmakers to lift the decades old ban on drilling in state waters did not send a representative to speak at the hearing. According to media reports, nobody has yet identified who the powerful interests are behind the group, which has hired scores of expensive Tallahassee lobbyists

and is said to be contributing to the election campaigns of both Republicans and Democrats running for office in Florida.

Nor did the front group for the mysterious Texas interests, Florida Energy Associates, offer testimony Wednesday during the meeting of the House Select Policy Council on Strategic and Economic Planning.

A spokesman for one of the state's most aggressive drilling proponents, Jose Gonzalez of Associated Industries of Florida (AIF), also admitted that oil drilling in Florida waters would have no effect on gasoline prices at the pump.

"One by one, the arguments used by the oil drilling proponent's are falling apart" said Eric Draper, deputy director of Florida Audubon, which has joined with a dozen statewide groups fighting the drilling proposal under the name Protect Florida's Beaches. "The claims about lowering prices at the pump are just as bogus as the claims about how much money drilling will bring to the state and the number of jobs.

"Even House committee members acknowledged the claims of jobs and revenues are speculative."

To date, county and city officials in Sarasota, Bay, Walton, Pinellas, Wakulla and Manatee counties, among others, have passed resolutions opposed to drilling," noted Joe Murphy of the Gulf Restoration Network, an organization that also belongs to the Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition.

"We are seeing a groundswell of incredibly strong opposition to drilling beginning to take shape among a diverse groups of businesses and government and conservation groups around the state," he said.

"Let's hope that our state lawmakers get the message."