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Down to the wire for Cape Wind

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South La. economy will be severely tested

Daily World, January 9, 2009; <http://www.dailyworld.com/article/20090109/OPINION01/901090306>

U.S. to collect less offshore oil revenue: government

Reuters, January 7, 2009; http://uk.reuters.com/article/reutersComService_3_MOLT/idUKTRE5066QH20090107

ExxonMobil: Global energy demand to rise 1.2%/year to 2030

Oil and Gas Journal, January 7, 2009;

http://www.ogj.com/display_article/349648/7/ONART/none/GenIn/1/ExxonMobil:-Global-energy-demand-to-rise-12/year-to-2030/

Thompson floats no-drill bill

The Times-Standard, January 7, 2009; http://www.times-standard.com/localnews/ci_11392330

Bush's Environmental Legacy Draws Mixed Reviews

FOX News, January 6, 2009; <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/01/06/bushs-environmental-legacy-draws-mixed-reviews/>

Obama's Chance For a Blue Legacy

Washington Post, January 6, 2009; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/05/AR2009010502346.html>

MMS rejects Va. governor's bid to delay lease sale

Greenwire, January 6, 2009; <http://www.eenews.net/Greenwire/2009/01/06/8>

Kempthorne touts Interior reforms in final speech

Seattle Post, January 5, 2009; http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/6420ap_id_kempthorne_final_speech.html

Bush to designate 3 new marine monuments

E&E News, January 5, 2009; <http://www.eenews.net/eenewspm/2009/01/05/1>

LIEBERMAN: No time for an oil crackdown

Washington Times, January 5, 2009; <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jan/05/no-time-for-an-oil-crackdown/>

Down to the wire for Cape Wind

Cape Cod Today, January 11, 2009; <http://www.capecodtoday.com/blogs/index.php/2009/01/11/down-to-the-wire-for-cape-wind?blog=94>

As Bush administration enters final days, project supporters await decision

By Wendy Williams

It's down to the wire now for Cape Wind, and whatever way the chips may fall, it's now Barack Obama's headache. The Bush administration (which had been lobbied hard by Cape Wind opponents) is off the hook.

And when it comes to Cape Wind, the new president will be in a no-win situation.

If he allows Cape Wind to be built, he risks alienating the powerful Kennedy family in its waning days. On the other hand, if he allows the project to continue to be mired in politically engendered delays, he risks alienating a good deal of the American population, who want to see renewable energy - read "energy independence" - projects move forward with all possible speed.

Developers and supporters of Cape Wind — a 130-turbine, 468-megawatt project that would be built on Horseshoe Shoal on Nantucket Sound — are looking ahead to next several days with what can best be described as high anxiety.

If the federal Minerals Management Service releases the long - long - awaited final environmental impact statement before the change in administrations on Tuesday, Jan. 20, there will be a minimum of 30 days before the final permit can be issued, which places it in the hands of the incoming administration.

Look for a lot of political mischief from the lobbyists of Cape Wind opponents during that period, including the almost-inevitable request for a waiting period much longer than the 30-day minimum.

Worst case under this scenario: The Kennedy clan uses its connections with the Obama administration to frighten the incoming officials from issuing the final permit for months on end.

If MMS chooses not to release the impact statement this coming week, then anything could happen. The document, which has been complete and ready to be released for quite some time, will fall into the ineluctable black hole of a new administration.

It typically takes months for a new administration to get boots on the ground, and during that period - unless Obama issues instructions to release the final EIS immediately - Cape Wind will likely get lost in the chaos.

Under the worst case scenario, the Kennedy influence sways the incoming administration and a completely new environmental impact statement is required. In this case, all sane observers would have to wonder if Cape Wind developer Jim Gordon and company would stay the course at a price of many more millions of dollars and, probably, several more years.

Absurd as it sounds, project developers have already been forced to undergo two entirely separate federal environmental impact statements to the tune of several thousand pages and several million dollars each for the proposed project, which would be built five miles south of Cape Cod. By itself, Cape Wind officials say, the wind farm could meet up to 75 percent of the power demand of the Cape and Islands.

Looking back at two major anti-Cape Wind efforts in Congress

A bit of history is helpful at this point. We'll have to look at not one, but two major political anti-Cape Wind efforts that took place in the halls of Washington. (There are a lot of others, but I'd have to write a book to explain them all.)

The first occurred in 2005, as the passage of the national Energy Policy Act of 2005 trudged forward. That was a bitter battle for many reasons: the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, oil and gas leasing, and so on and so forth. But Cape Cod and the wind industry were particularly engrossed in the decision over which federal agency would oversee the long-term construction of offshore wind in the United States.

Until the passage of that act, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was the federal lead agency in permitting offshore wind. This occurred by default, since no federal legislation specifically addressed offshore wind. By 2005, Cape Wind developers had paid for a full-scale environmental impact statement done for the Army Corps. This document gave Cape Wind a comparatively clean bill of health.

When Congress passed the energy act in September of 2005, it handed responsibility for offshore wind to the federal Minerals Management Agency - the same agency that has recently been caught in some rather egregious behavior as regards the oil and gas industry. In Denver, for example MMS people were - literally - sleeping with oil and gas people.

In the 2005 act, Congress directed MMS to promulgate rules for permitting offshore wind within 270 days, or about nine months, of the act's passage. (Here we are now in 2009, and that task has yet to be completed.)

Congress also directed MMS to treat Cape Wind separately, since the project had already been in the pipeline since 2001. Most observers expected Cape Wind to move forward with comparative alacrity, but for reasons that have yet to be publicly disclosed, that did not happen. The weeks stretched into months, and the months stretched into years.

Ultimately, MMS decided that it needed to have Cape Wind undergo yet another complete, full-scale environmental impact statement. Yet another full set of public hearings were held - at great cost to the public - in March of 2008.

After that, the release of the MMS-engendered EIS should have occurred tout suite.

But here we are, 10 months after those public hearings, the final EIS continues to be held up. MMS has yet to give the public an explanation of why the release of this document has been delayed, but a look at several letters tell a tale of lobbying on the part of lawyers and lobbyists paid for by the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, a non-profit group that opposes construction of Cape Wind.

Now we have to return to the engrossing events of 2006, when Alaskan Congressman Don Young tried to sneak a provision that would have killed Cape Wind into a federal transportation bill.

The Alaskan Republican was then the head of the federal Transportation Committee, under which the subject of marine safety is subsumed.

Theories of why Young would concern himself with a wind project proposed for the other side of the continent were multitudinous. Some said he had it in for Ted Roosevelt IV, who was heading the financial packaging for Cape Wind. Others wondered if Young was doing a favor for lobbying friends in the oil industry. Still others even speculated that Ted Kennedy had offered to back down on his opposition to drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge - a theory for which no evidence was ever provided.

The 2006 fight in Washington over Cape Wind, a true battle royale, finally ended with a very angry Ted Kennedy spouting off against the project on the floor of the Senate. At one point, he compared Cape Wind head Jim Gordon to Halliburton. In the end, his effort was defeated.

But the legislation did specify that the Coast Guard would have to sign off on the marine safety issue as regards Cape Wind and offshore wind in general.

The Coast Guard subsequently did so, but the lobbying against the project on safety grounds continued. In 2008, Cape Wind opponents succeeded in having letters sent from a variety of elected officials who insisted that the safety issue had not been adequately addressed.

In response, the Coast Guard agreed to have a session discussing marine radar. This little-publicized session, held this past October in North Falmouth, was attended by only two reporters - me and Cape Cod Today journalist Jim Kinsella. Almost no Cape Wind supporters turned up, but a variety of project opponents sat in the audience and lined the wall behind Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound employees and members.

It was apparent at that session that the Alliance intended to force the issue of marine safety. A radar expert pleaded the case for the Alliance. Cape Wind flew in an expert from Europe who had done a study that showed that the effect of wind turbines on marine radar would be minimal.

Nevertheless, the Coast Guard, probably because of political pressure, decided to do its own study.

In December 2008, the Coast Guard made clear that, in its judgment, the minimal effects of wind turbines on marine radar could be mitigated and that the marine safety issue was not a show-stopper. Cape Wind has agreed to follow through with the Coast Guard's suggestions for mitigation.

Intrigue against Cape Wind behind the scenes

While all this was going on for the public to take note of, a great deal of political intrigue also occurred behind the scenes.

Letters pressuring the Minerals Management Agency not to release the final EIS were sent from several of Cape Wind's ancient enemies.

For example, U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall, a Democrat from West Virginia, asked the MMS to delay action.

Why would an official from West Virginia care? Rahall comes from a district where coal is heavily mined, and many of his major campaign contributors make money from that industry.

Union Pacific, for example, contributed \$10,000 to his chest in 2008, which is not surprising given that American railroads now make most of their profits from the transportation of coal to coal-fired electric power generators.

(If wind power gains a large market share, coal will be the big loser. Oil and gas have a number of alternative markets, but coal is primarily sold in America as a fuel for electric power generators.)

What surprised most observers was that the super-progressive Rep. James Oberstar, a Democrat from Minnesota got on the delay-Cape-Wind bandwagon. Oberstar is now head of the House Transportation Committee, a position that he assumed from Don Young after the 2006 elections when the Democrats gained a majority in the House.

In two letters, Oberstar has suggested that he would (1) hold Congressional hearings on Cape Wind per se, and then (2) hold hearings on all offshore wind projects.

Why Oberstar would take such a seemingly non-progressive stance seems confusing at first. But consider this: Richard C. Hiscock is now a staffer on the Transportation Committee's subcommittee on the Coast Guard.

Hiscock assumed this position in 2007. Hiscock has a decades-long association with the powerful and beautiful people in Chatham, Mass. He has held a number of positions in the town, including a stint as assistant harbormaster. His resume even lists him as "fisherman" on the lobster vessel Benjo out of Chatham in 1977 and 1978. His resume also lists his high school as the private Moses Brown School, which currently charges about \$25,000 a year in tuition. Hiscock also apparently free-lanced during the 1970s for The Cape Codder, The Cape Cod Chronicle and Soundings.

Among Hiscock's responsibilities as a senior staffer under Oberstar is the "preparation of subject matter memorandums for hearings."

So there we are: Someone with a definite dog in the Cape Wind fight has the ear of progressive Minnesota Congressman James Oberstar. This also explains why Alliance head Glenn Wattley was able with such great confidence to tell a reporter in December that he thought he would give Oberstar a call to complain about MMS and Cape Wind. (Since assuming the role of head of the Alliance, Glenn Wattley has been a very busy man.)

We should also give other credit where the credit is due: Kennedy aides have been lobbying Oberstar. It would be hard to overestimate the desire of younger Democratic congressionals to do things for Ted Kennedy right now.

Kennedy is the reigning Liberal Lion and many younger officials on the left truly worship the man. Given the sad fact of the senator's brain cancer, many in Washington will be reluctant to make Kennedy unhappy.

Since the 1970s, Kennedy has been trying to have his beloved Nantucket Sound designated as a National Marine Sanctuary. The efforts have been rejected so far, since most studies show that this particular body of water has no scientifically outstanding resources that would support such a designation.

Since Cape Wind was first proposed in 2001, Delahunt aide Mark Forest has renewed those efforts. It's possible that, given Washington's outpouring of sympathy toward the beloved Ted Kennedy, Forest's efforts may gain ground.

Cape Wind: action or the black hole?

So, bottom line: Where does Cape Wind stand? MMS could release their final EIS for Cape Wind next week. In this case, final permitting should — but not necessarily will — occur in 30 days.

Or, the agency will continue to delay, which means that the document will fall into the black hole of a new presidential administration.

If that happens, the outcome is anybody's guess.

South La. economy will be severely tested

Daily World, January 9, 2009; <http://www.dailyworld.com/article/20090109/OPINION01/901090306>

In the 1980s, some Acadiana people hit by the massive oil bust kept their sense of humor as they scrambled to find jobs in other states.

A favorite bumper sticker read, "Will the last person leaving Lafayette turn off the lights."

It was, by no means, a time of laughter. The collapsing petroleum industry took businesses throughout Acadiana down with it.

Jobs disappeared as did people from this and other areas in which the economy was built around the petroleum industry.

Now, with oil prices dropping and capital deteriorating, people in the oil industry fear that a repeat of the crisis of the 1980s could lie ahead.

Don Briggs, president of the Louisiana Oil and Gas Association, is one of those expressing concern.

His focus is on the deterioration of capital. He illustrated his concerns with a true story of a member of the Oil and Gas Association who raised \$100 million to develop a field.

His plans cratered when the lender called to tell him the money was no longer available. According to Briggs, this is not an uncommon situation now.

He and other industry experts expect the domestic rig count, which hit 2,032 in September, to drop by as many as a thousand rigs in 2009.

The industry was knocked for loop when the price of oil fell from \$101 at the U.S. rig peak to \$38 at years end.

Results of the price drops are not surprising. According to Briggs, energy companies are slashing drilling budgets - moves that affect shale and national gas operations, as well as oil.

Summing up the situation, Briggs said, "It's scary stuff. I'm very concerned about it."

Elsewhere in the petroleum industry, there are concerns about the changes that will be made when Barak Obama becomes president.

Oil and gas officials worry about Obama's choice of Colorado Sen. Ken Salazar to head the Interior Department.

Salazar has supported opening new areas of the Gulf of Mexico to drilling, and sharing federal revenues with Louisiana.

He has opposed opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling, however, and development of shale and natural gas production.

The top concern of Obama in the area of energy is development of alternative fuels.

Oil industry personnel are faced with the necessity of convincing him that alternative fuels and offshore drilling are not mutually exclusive, and that offshore drilling doesn't have to pose an environmental threat. Louisiana operations support that.

If a crisis such as that of the '80s occurs, the South Louisiana economy will be severely tested. We will learn whether moves to diversify the economy have given us sufficient protection against another devastating oil industry collapse.

U.S. to collect less offshore oil revenue: government

Reuters, January 7, 2009; http://uk.reuters.com/article/reutersComService_3_MOLT/idUKTRE5066QH20090107

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States will collect \$77 billion less from federal offshore drilling leases over the next 9 years than previously estimated, congressional forecasters said on Wednesday.

The Congressional Budget Office said falling oil prices were the cause of the projected decline in revenue from leases for energy exploration on Outer Continental Shelf.

The government agency did not say the drop in revenue was due to any decline in actual energy production.

Oil prices settled around \$42 a barrel Wednesday, down significantly from the record levels above \$147 a barrel reached in July.

The Interior Department, which is responsible for collecting and distributing royalties, rent and bonuses for the use of federal lands for energy production, dispensed a record \$23.4 billion during fiscal year 2008.

High energy prices and more than \$10 billion in bonus bids paid for leases to explore the Outer Continental Shelf in the Gulf of Mexico and Alaska contributed to the record disbursement.

ExxonMobil: Global energy demand to rise 1.2%/year to 2030

Oil and Gas Journal, January 7, 2009;

http://www.ogj.com/display_article/349648/7/ONART/none/GenIn/1/ExxonMobil:-Global-energy-demand-to-rise-12/year-to-2030/

Paula Dittrick

HOUSTON, Jan. 7 -- ExxonMobil Corp. expects global energy demand to increase by an average 1.2%/year during 2005-30, even assuming major energy efficiency gains.

Driven by growing populations and expanding economies, global demand is expected to increase to 310 million b/d of oil in 2030 from the equivalent of 229 million b/d in 2005.

ExxonMobil's latest annual "Outlook for Energy: A View to 2030" was expanded to include an examination of improved energy efficiency, development of all viable forms of energy, climate risk technology, and public policy.

"The world needs to meet the ever-growing need for reliable and affordable energy while minimizing the effects on the environment," said Rex W. Tillerson, ExxonMobil chairman and chief executive officer.

The outlook is developed through a detailed analysis of about 100 countries. Results are underpinned by economic and population projections.

Among this year's outlook findings:

-- Oil, natural gas, and coal will continue to provide about 80% of the world's energy needs through 2030 because of their abundance, affordability, and availability.

-- Nuclear energy production is expected to increase, riding an anticipated emphasis on low-carbon fuels.

-- Production and use of renewable fuels, such as wind, solar, and biofuels also will escalate rapidly.

-- Transportation, currently responsible for more than half of total oil demand, is expected to expand substantially globally. From 2005-30, demand in developed countries is expected to be relatively stable because efficiency improvements will offset demand from an increasing number of vehicles. In contrast, demand for transportation fuels in developing countries will likely more than double.

Global carbon dioxide emissions are projected to rise by close to 30% during 2005-30 even with improved energy efficiency and growth in nuclear and renewable energy sources. ExxonMobil expects CO2 emissions will begin declining in the US and Europe by 2030. But those declines will be offset by larger increases in developing countries.

Thompson floats no-drill bill

The Times-Standard, January 7, 2009; http://www.times-standard.com/localnews/ci_11392330

John Driscoll

Rep. Mike Thompson has lodged legislation aimed at permanently protecting the North Coast from oil and gas drilling after recent moves by the federal government to pursue oil exploration.

The bill would prevent drilling along the Humboldt, Mendocino and Del Norte coasts outside the 3-mile state jurisdiction. A ban on drilling on the outer continental shelf died in the last Congress, and the U.S. Interior Department quickly moved to open some areas for exploration.

Thompson said that drilling off the California coast could threaten a critical area of ocean in which upwelling brings nutrients from the sea floor and energizes the food chain critical for fisheries, one of few such regions in the world.

"Drilling on the North Coast doesn't make sense, either from an economic standpoint or an environmental perspective," said the St. Helena Democrat. "By permanently banning drilling, we can provide our coast with the protection it needs, regardless of who is in charge in Washington."

Millions of gallons of oil spilled onto Santa Barbara area beaches from an oil platform accident in 1969, and a Congressional moratorium on drilling went into place in 1981, but had to be renewed each year.

Assemblyman Wesley Chesbro, D-Arcata, said the state had to fight every year to get the moratorium into the budget to prevent the Interior Department from proceeding with exploration. By the 1990s, he said, a bipartisan consensus was reached on the idea that some areas should be protected.

"We saw how tenuous that protection was when it became a political football during the presidential campaign," Chesbro said.

A number of areas off the California coast -- including off the Eel River delta -- are rich in oil and gas and have been eyed in the past by the oil industry. Those regions aren't protected like the designated marine sanctuaries from Monterey to southern Sonoma County.

Spills from the vessels Kure and Stuyvesant in 1997 and 1999 killed thousands of birds in the Humboldt Bay area, something environmentalists fear could happen again if oil spills from a platform offshore.

Pete Nichols with Humboldt Baykeeper said Thompson's bill is welcome and should have support from Congress and the incoming president, Barack Obama.

"This may be at least a way to get the discussion back on the table," Nichols said.

Bush's Environmental Legacy Draws Mixed Reviews

FOX News, January 6, 2009; <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/01/06/bushs-environmental-legacy-draws-mixed-reviews/>

President Bush won the praise of environmentalists Tuesday for leading the largest marine conservation effort in history, but his critics are still bitter over his environmental legacy.

President Bush felt the warm embrace of environmentalists Tuesday as he announced the largest marine conservation effort in history -- the designation of three remote Pacific island chains as national monuments.

Some went so far as to compare Bush to Teddy Roosevelt, who created the national park system a century ago.

"This administration has done more for the environment and addressing climate change than any other in history," Kristen Hellmer, a spokeswoman for the Executive Office of the President Council on Environmental Quality, said in a written statement.

"Since taking office, President Bush has committed more than \$42 billion to climate change research, technology, incentives and programs. His policy is science-based, and is focused on a portfolio of actions that foster economic growth, achieve emissions reductions through technology investments, and include developed and developing economies."

But others said Bush's conservation effort, while laudable, was not enough to erase the lowlights of his environmental record. Groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council say Bush over the last eight years dismantled environmental safeguards, ignored climate concerns, undermined scientific results and pandered to industries that jeopardized Americans' health and natural heritage.

"I think he's consistently put the interests of his cronies in the oil business far ahead of a real commitment to clean and renewable energy resources," Michael Oko, a spokesman for the group, told FOXNews.com

Laura Capps, senior vice president for Ocean Conservancy, said of Bush's most recent effort, "The Bush administration deserves our applause and praise for taking such bold action.

"But you have to look at the entire record," she added. "Looking at the last eight years, you really have to balance comparisons with little or no action on global warming and lifting a 27-year ban on new offshore drilling."

Capps described Bush's environmental record as mixed.

"The ocean community is happy and thrilled," she said about Bush's conservation effort. "But we're still fighting on many other fronts."

Bush defended his legacy Tuesday during his announcement of the marine conservation effort, citing all of his accomplishments since 2001, including a 12 percent drop in air pollution, protecting more than 27 million acres of federal forest land from wildfires and saving or improving more than 3.6 million acres of wetlands.

"At the same time, we've taken aggressive steps to make America's energy supply cleaner and more secure and confronted the challenge of global climate change," he said, adding that he signed two major energy bills, raised average fuel efficiency standards for automobiles for the first time in more than a decade and mandated major increases in the use of renewable fuels and the efficiency of lighting and appliances.

"With all these steps, we have charted the way toward a more promising era in environmental stewardship," he said.

But Bush's environmental record has been under attack for years.

In 2004, James Hansen, NASA's top climate expert, blasted the Bush administration, accusing officials of altering news releases, revising government reports and rejecting scientific results to keep the public in the dark about the dangers of global warming.

Bush drew fire for refusing to sign the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on climate change, saying the landmark agreement, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions believed to be behind rising global temperatures, would have destroyed the U.S. economy. He also noted that the treaty didn't require other "big polluters" such as India and China to cut emissions.

But Bush wasn't alone in rejecting Kyoto, which went into effect in 2005. In 1997, then-President Bill Clinton did not send the U.S. Senate the treaty to ratify, having been informed two years earlier that it would not have passed. Clinton later criticized Bush for rejecting Kyoto.

Earlier this year, Bush announced a national goal of stopping the projected growth of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 2025.

Obama's Chance For a Blue Legacy

Washington Post, January 6, 2009; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/05/AR2009010502346.html>

By Vikki Spruill

Today, President Bush will begin for the ocean what President Theodore Roosevelt did when he created the National Park System. The administration is announcing plans to create a national monument that will protect 195,000 square nautical miles of the Pacific Ocean -- bigger than the size of California and almost 50 percent larger

than all U.S. national parks combined. Sweeping areas of the ocean's most pristine treasures, including spectacular corals and the deepest canyon in the world, will be protected by law and given the chance to become stronger.

Yet what is most significant about this move is the opportunity it creates for President-elect Barack Obama.

Covering 71 percent of the planet, the oceans are our life-support system. They provide most of the oxygen that we breathe and much of the food that we eat. As the engine that drives our climate, the oceans are the front line of the global climate challenge, absorbing half of the carbon dioxide we've pumped into the atmosphere and more excess heat from greenhouse gases than all the rain forests combined. Indeed, the oceans are the unsung hero in the climate change battle -- but they are also the most vulnerable victims.

And while today's designation and protection represent major progress, there is still much to be done. The effects of climate change on the oceans are widespread; higher air and water temperatures alone have produced changes including the loss of sea ice, shifts in ocean circulation, rises in sea level, extreme weather events and harmful changes to fish and other marine wildlife. The increased concentration of carbon dioxide has led to acidification of ocean water, threatening the crucial base of the food web. The need to build ocean resilience is all the more critical since the 27-year moratorium on new oil and gas drilling offshore was lifted last year, threatening further harm to the marine environment while, ironically, doing little to resolve the nation's energy crisis.

We at the Ocean Conservancy urge the Obama administration to build on President Bush's step forward by strengthening ocean protections that ensure the health of our planet. Obama could begin building a truly blue legacy with the following steps:

- Mandate that every action on climate change include consideration of its impact on our oceans. The executive branch's No. 1 impediment in responding effectively to the impacts of climate change on the oceans is lack of authority and guidance. The president should direct his team to determine how best to manage for increased ocean resilience and adaptation to the effects of climate change and how to strengthen the needed science.
- Focus on the Arctic. The Arctic, Earth's air conditioner, is already experiencing some of the most severe effects of climate change. Not only is sea ice melting, but coastal communities have been dislocated. Despite the profound fragility of many marine ecosystems in the Arctic, the Bush administration has set out to open 77 million acres for oil and gas development -- exploration that will, ironically, increase greenhouse gas emissions that cause the melting. Any industrialization of the Arctic must be preceded by a comprehensive scientific assessment of the consequences of carrying out industrial activities. As the relevant Cabinet member, the interior secretary should immediately suspend any further planned lease sales and commence a multiagency public review and assessment of the Arctic, its peoples and its resources.
- Bring order to the oceans. Like urban sprawl, we have marine and coastal sprawl, as the oceans today face a wealth of unprecedented activity. Wind farms and other energy facilities, commercial fishing, diverse recreational uses, offshore drilling and shipping superhighways are all competing to stake their claims. We urgently need a comprehensive plan for the oceans' many uses, in a way that sustains our oceans' resources. For example, in the production of seafood, the administration has the opportunity to ensure that commercial fishing and aquaculture are both pursued sustainably. As president, Obama should issue an executive order stating the national responsibility to manage America's waters for long-term ocean health and to make smart decisions for our shared ocean future.

These initial actions, in addition to fulfilling Obama's promise to combat climate change, would set the stage for a blue presidential legacy -- one that Teddy Roosevelt would envy and of which Obama could be proud.

MMS rejects Va. governor's bid to delay lease sale

Greenwire, January 6, 2009; <http://www.eenews.net/Greenwire/2009/01/06/8>

Noelle Straub

The Minerals Management Service has rejected a request from Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine (D) to delay plans for a proposed lease sale off the state's coast until President-elect Barack Obama takes office.

Last month, Kaine asked for an extension until Feb. 28, 2009, of the public comment period on a step kicking off the planning process for a 2011 lease sale in an area beginning 50 miles from the state's coast, as called for in the

agency's current five-year coastal leasing plan. The delay would allow the incoming Obama administration to consider its options with regard to the sale, Kaine wrote.

Several lawmakers have asked MMS to drop the process altogether.

But MMS has decided to extend the comment period, originally scheduled to end Dec. 29, 2008, until Jan. 13, 2009. In a notice to be published in tomorrow's Federal Register, the agency says it granted a delay only due to the holidays.

Even with the public comment period closed, MMS Director Randall Luthi has acknowledged, the Obama administration would be able to slow or reverse the lease sale process.

In his letter, Kaine also disputed the agency's claims that he requested the steps be taken to prepare for the sale.

Kempthorne touts Interior reforms in final speech

Seattle Post, January 5, 2009; http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/6420ap_id_kempthorne_final_speech.html

By JOHN MILLER

BOISE, Idaho -- Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne said Monday his two-year Washington D.C., stint was highlighted by ethics reforms he hopes will improve the agency's integrity after a slew of tainted decisions, as well as drug and sex allegations.

The former Idaho governor, who took national office in May 2006 after Gale Norton's departure, spoke here in what he called his "last formal speech" as a Bush administration cabinet member. U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., has been nominated by President-elect Barack Obama to replace Kempthorne.

The past two years have seen news accounts of Interior staffers who have been found to have improperly interfered with Endangered Species Act decisions; have been convicted of lying to Congress; and have been discovered to have had sex with oil-industry executives, as well as using cocaine and marijuana. Most of this activity took place while Norton headed the office, between 2001 and 2006.

Kempthorne said he's installed a new ethics officer, has stressed the importance of recording discussions on potentially dicey matters in an ethics logbook, made an ethics DVD required viewing for new employees and fired employees involved in the worst of the transgressions.

"Without question, there have been a variety of issues concerning the integrity and activities of certain aspects of the Department," Kempthorne, Idaho's governor from 1999 to 2006 and Boise's mayor for eight years starting in 1985, told more than 200 people at a City Club speech.

"We have endeavored to create an atmosphere and culture of ethics in the Department, which is critically important," he said. "I tell them, 'My mantra is, if in doubt, don't.' "

Julie MacDonald, a deputy assistant secretary overseeing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service until her resignation in May 2007, was found to have exerted improper political interference on nearly every decision made on the protection of federally endangered species over five years.

Meanwhile, Steven Griles, a former Norton deputy, in June became the highest-ranking Bush administration official convicted in the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal. He was sentenced to 10 months in prison for lying to the U.S. Senate.

And in September 2008, an Interior Department Inspector General probe found a "culture of substance abuse and promiscuity" in Interior's Denver Minerals Management Service office, in charge of collecting billions of dollars in federal oil royalties. From 2002 through 2006, some staffers there were having sex with oil company personnel and using cocaine and marijuana, the report said.

For much of the last eight years, the Department of Interior, whose 73,000 employees oversee the federal Endangered Species Act, a fifth of U.S. territory and 391 national parks, has been lambasted by environmental groups as an agency where politics and power trumped good policy.

Some insist that hasn't changed under Kempthorne.

"If he stopped people in MMS from going to bed with oil companies, quite literally, I'm all for that," said Charles Clusen, a senior analyst at the Natural Resource Defense Council, in Washington, D.C. "But there's the integrity of the science and policy and decisions that are more important. The Department of the Interior has been a place where the interests of private companies supersede sound science and the public interest."

Clusen criticized recent Bush administration-issued changes to Endangered Species Act regulations that environmentalists say would, among other things, block the law from being used to combat global warming. The changes, which also eliminate some of the independent reviews government scientists do on dams, power plants and timber sales, take effect this month, just as Obama takes office.

Kempthorne disputed the contention that his office has rushed modifications late in Bush's final term.

He said he gave ample warning about the impending Endangered Species Act changes when he listed the polar bear as a "threatened species" in May due to receding sea ice but refused to endorse the 1973 law as an instrument to regulate climate change. His role as the Bush administration winds down was akin to that of a quarterback in the waning minutes of the Super Bowl, he said.

"If you're to play in the entire game, you're to do what you've been asked to do," Kempthorne said. "Until Jan. 20, I am the secretary of Interior and I work for you. And I'm not just going to sit on the sidelines."

Bush to designate 3 new marine monuments

E&E News, January 5, 2009; <http://www.eenews.net/eenewspm/2009/01/05/1>

Allison Winter

President George W. Bush will designate vast areas of the Pacific Ocean tomorrow as marine monuments -- part of an ambitious bid for a positive environmental legacy in his final weeks in office.

The designation will include three new monuments in remote areas of the Pacific around U.S. territories. Altogether, the protected areas will encompass 195,000 square miles -- the largest area of ocean or seabed set aside in the world, according to White House Council on Environmental Quality Chairman James Connaughton.

"This is a huge day for marine conservation," Connaughton told reporters this afternoon.

President George W. Bush will name three new marine monuments to protect vast areas of the Pacific Ocean around remote U.S. territories.

The designation will restrict commercial fishing in some areas around coral reefs but will leave fishing in other areas under the control of the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Recreational fishing may be allowed under special permits.

Bush is scheduled to make the announcement at the White House tomorrow. Representatives from the islands and environmental groups have been invited to attend. The president can use the 1906 Antiquities Act to create the marine monuments without congressional approval. The law gives the president broad power to protect "objects of historic or scientific interest."

The scope of the designation and the protections for the monuments represent a middle ground -- it is not the size or level of protection environmental groups had hoped for when they proposed "no-take" marine reserves for the new monuments last year. But it is better than groups had feared several weeks ago, when White House officials discussed scaling down the proposal, in part due to fishing concerns.

In most areas, the monuments will go 50 nautical miles out from each small island. Environmental groups had asked the administration to use the farthest reach of its jurisdiction and protect 200 miles around each island. The Marianas Trench designation will protect the area from the rim to the seafloor, but will not include the living resources in the water above the trench.

Connaughton said the designation represents consensus from federal scientists and various stakeholder groups.

Bush won some of the most favorable environmental notices of his administration when he designated the nearly 140,000-square-mile monument in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands in 2006. In attempt to build on the success of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, the administration asked environmental groups for input on other areas for protection.

Environmentalists urged Bush to use his executive power to protect large areas of the Pacific from fishing, oil exploration and other commercial development. But sportfishing groups and the government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands had opposed parts of those plans, forcing the administration to reconsider.

The proposal encompasses coral reefs, undersea mountains and the deepest canyon on the planet. It will protect vast swaths of the Pacific Ocean near U.S. territories that are closer to Japan than to California -- Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands and a string of tiny uninhabited islands in the central Pacific. The federal government controls the ocean water within 200 miles of the islands.

Each area has unique marine life. Rose Atoll, the smallest atoll in the world, has coral reefs and a lagoon that are home to the region's largest concentration of nesting sea turtles, birds and giant clams.

The Line Islands are surrounded by coral reefs and serve as feeding stations for migratory fish and seabirds. Scientists have studied the area for clues to how reefs functioned in the past and have discovered a unique system with an inverted food pyramid -- with more large species than small. The small organisms are thought to reproduce more quickly to sustain the system.

The Mariana Islands have unique geology that marine groups liken to an underwater Yellowstone and Grand Canyon combined. Marine life thrives around hydrothermal vents, mud volcanoes and pools of boiling sulfur. The area hosts 19 species of whales and dolphins and abundant shark populations. The deepest spot on the seafloor is in the Marianas Trench: Mount Everest could sit on its bottom and still be covered by more than 7,000 feet of water.

LIEBERMAN: No time for an oil crackdown

Washington Times, January 5, 2009; <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jan/05/no-time-for-an-oil-crackdown/>

Ben Lieberman

How does \$8-a-gallon gas sound? Few Americans would want to see that happen. Unfortunately, President-elect Barack Obama's choices for the governments two highest energy posts have expressed a surprising level of comfort with sky-high gas prices.

As if that weren't bad enough, the incoming Obama administration and new Congress have suggested they may reverse the pro-domestic oil drilling measures enacted since last summer. It is starting to look as though the change coming to Washington will bring bad news at the pump in the years ahead.

As gas prices topped \$4 a gallon last July, President Bush revoked the longstanding executive order that outlawed oil exploration and drilling in 85 percent of Americas territorial waters - nearly everywhere off the "Lower 48" except Texas and Louisiana. Congress followed up by allowing its own 27-year-old offshore moratorium to lapse on Oct. 1.

These outdated restrictions should never have stayed on the books for so long - the risk of oil spills has been dramatically minimized with the latest technologies. But at least Washington did the right thing by belatedly getting rid of them.

Thus, the leasing process can commence in areas estimated to contain 19 billion barrels of untapped oil - about 30 years of current imports from Saudi Arabia. And, it should be noted, these initial estimates tend to be on the low side. We may well find much more oil.

Earlier in the year, then-candidate Barack Obama and leading Democrats in Congress opposed this expansion of domestic oil drilling. However, both relented in the face of last summer's public outrage over \$4-a-gallon gas, as well as polls showing 2-to-1 support for more drilling.

But, as they say, that was then. Since the election, both the incoming administration and Congress have signaled they may reverse position and undo this policy. And two key Obama appointments may want to go further.

Sen. Ken Salazar, Colorado Democrat and Mr. Obama's nominee for interior secretary, was on record as opposing lifting the offshore moratorium even if gasoline were to reach \$10 a gallon. The Interior Department runs the federal energy-leasing programs. As secretary, Mr. Salazar would have the power to slow such leasing to a crawl, with or without the help of Congress.

In fairness, Mr. Salazar strongly opposed offshore drilling but never said he actually wanted the price of gas to skyrocket. The same cannot be said of Energy Secretary-nominee Steven Chu. Last September, he told the Wall Street Journal that "somehow we have to figure out how to boost the price of gasoline to the levels in Europe." European gas taxes are much higher than in the United States and are designed to force people to drive less, or not at all. At the time of Mr. Chu's comment, the "levels in Europe" were above \$8 a gallon.

Beyond restoring the ban on offshore drilling, the Obama transition team is also considering adding to the restrictions facing onshore drilling, something Mr. Salazar has pushed for in the Senate. He has also been instrumental in placing regulatory roadblocks in front of oil shale in Colorado and other states where this alternative energy source exists. Though the process of extracting oil from shale is still being developed, if successful it could produce hundreds of billions of barrels of oil - enough to supply the United States for many decades.

Being so stridently anti-energy may not be the political poison it was last summer now that gas prices have plummeted by more than half. Nonetheless, this is not the time for complacency about oil supplies. The main reason for the price decline - a slumping economy that has dampened demand - is one that few expect (or want) to last forever. If we don't get serious about expanding oil production, pump prices could go back up as soon as the economy starts to turn around.

In all likelihood, we have not seen the last of \$4-a-gallon gas. Imagine if we return to that level - and the consumer anger that accompanies it - perhaps as soon as 2010. How will the public feel about an Obama administration and Congress that came in and instituted a sweeping crackdown on domestic oil supplies?
