

START A DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION – \$4 A MONTH

[Manage my subscription](#) [Sign in](#)

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

[Home](#) / [News](#) / [Government & Politics](#) / [Local Government](#)

[http://pilotonline.com/news/government/local/article\\_e97d6e0a-5f73-5324-9682-a5e1df7510b7.html](http://pilotonline.com/news/government/local/article_e97d6e0a-5f73-5324-9682-a5e1df7510b7.html)

# Virginia Beach wants the same protection from offshore drilling Florida was promised

By Mechelle Hankerson  
The Virginian-Pilot  
Feb 7, 2018



Bill Tiernan | The Virginian-Pilot

Judy Schooley, right, of Virginia Beach was among members of the Sierra Club who stood along Indian River Road outside the Founders Inn in Virginia Beach, where an Offshore Energy Forum was hosted by the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce on Monday, Sept. 21, 2015. At left is Jacqueline Lowe of Chesapeake.

## MORE INFORMATION



Virginia lawmakers say Trump's offshore oil drilling exemption for Florida should apply here

Virginia, North Carolina are back in play for offshore oil and gas drilling

Trump administration to lay out plans to expand offshore drilling

Gov. Northam urged Interior secretary to drop Virginia from drilling plan

Feds will find few locals who think oil rigs off Virginia help our state and region



### VIRGINIA BEACH

Leaders want the local coastline taken off a newly expanded list of places open for offshore drilling.

City Council members approved a resolution Tuesday reiterating the city's opposition to offshore drilling. It also asks for congressional representatives to help secure the same promise from the federal government as Florida, which was assured that it would be "off the table" for drilling.

The White House proposed a five-year offshore leasing program last month that would open most of the East Coast to drilling. The plan isn't final, and a public hearing will be held in Richmond Feb. 21.

**"I have witnessed Governor Scott's leadership through hurricane season and am working closely with him on Everglades restoration. He is a straightforward leader that can be trusted. President Trump has directed me to rebuild our offshore oil and gas program in a manner that supports our national energy policy and also takes into consideration the local and state voice. I support the governor's position that Florida is unique and its coasts are heavily reliant on tourism as an economic driver. As a result of discussion with Governor Scott's and his leadership, I am removing Florida from consideration for any new oil and gas platforms." – Secretary Ryan Zinke**



**Secretary Ryan Zinke**  
@SecretaryZinke

Read my full statement on taking [#Florida](#) off the table for offshore oil and gas. Local voice matters.

6:48 PM - Jan 9, 2018

1,901 6,736 people are talking about this

Days after the proposal was announced, Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke said Florida wouldn't be open for

drilling.

“President Trump has directed me to rebuild our offshore oil and gas program in a manner that supports our national energy policy and also takes into consideration the local and state voice,” Zinke wrote in a statement on Twitter. “I support (Gov. Rick Scott’s) position that Florida is unique and its coasts are heavily reliant on tourism as an economic driver.”

 Download PDF



**ITEM:** A Resolution Reiterating Opposition to Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration and Seeking the Same Exemption Provided to the State of Florida

**MEETING DATE:** February 6, 2018

■ **Background:** In 2015, local business organizations and Council-appointed advisory agencies urged the City Council to oppose offshore oil and gas exploration, including the Resort Advisory Commission, the City's Green Ribbon Committee, the Virginia Aquarium Foundation, Lynnhaven River NOW, the Virginia Beach Hotel Association, and the Virginia Beach Restaurant Association. The Princess Anne Garden Club, the Virginia Beach Garden Club, the Sandbridge Civic League and the Resort Beach Civic League also expressed their opposition to offshore oil and gas exploration. These organizations oppose such exploration due to the vulnerability of the coast and beaches to catastrophes that could adversely impact the City's tourism industry for decades. The tourism industry is vital to the City's economic prosperity, accounting for \$1.4 billion in annual tourism revenue, nearly 13,000 tourism-supported local jobs, and \$55 million in tourism-related taxes

Concerns also have been raised that offshore energy exploration could conflict with the Department of Defense's mission requirements, including expanded weapon and sensor footprints and operations in the Mid-Atlantic Planning Area that includes areas off of Virginia Beach's coastline. Also, almost 3,000 commercial fishermen work in Virginia and make significant contributions to the state and the City's economic vitality, and an offshore energy exploration catastrophe could devastate their industry.

Based on these concerns, the City Council in June 2017 adopted a resolution opposing offshore oil and gas exploration, including seismic testing. Since then, the United States Secretary of the Interior has proposed opening nearly all United States coastline to offshore oil and gas drilling, but the Secretary recently promised to keep Florida "off the table" for offshore drilling.

■ **Considerations:** This resolution reiterates Council's opposition to offshore exploration and requests that the Secretary of the Interior extend to Virginia Beach the same protections that have been promised to Florida. The resolution also requests the assistance of Senators Kaine and Warner and Congressman Taylor.

■ **Public Information:** Will be provided through the normal agenda process.

■ **Attachment:** Resolution

**Requested by Councilmember Uhrin, Mayor Sessoms, Vice Mayor Jones, and Councilmembers Davenport, Dyer, Henley, Kane, Wilson and Wood**

Same goes for Virginia Beach, according to local leaders. Tourism is “vital” to the city’s economy, generating \$1.4 billion in annual revenue and \$55 million in annual tourism taxes and providing 13,000 jobs, according to the resolution.

Virginia Beach leaders worry that offshore drilling could expose the area to another major oil spill, like the BP spill in 2010. The rig in that incident, Deepwater Horizon, exploded and killed 11 workers.

“The speculative benefit of oil and gas exploration and drilling is not worth the risk of a Deepwater Horizon-type incident that could cripple the city’s economy for decades,” the resolution stated.

Plus, offshore drilling could affect the military’s ability to complete its work, the resolution stated, as well as affect the commercial fishing industry.

Virginia Beach has long opposed offshore drilling and passed a resolution last summer formally stating its position. It had the support of community groups like the Sandbridge and Resort Beach civic leagues, Lynnhaven River NOW, the Virginia Aquarium Foundation, Virginia Beach Hotel Association and the Virginia Beach Restaurant Association.

Norfolk and the counties of Accomack and Northampton have passed similar resolutions against offshore drilling.

Virginia Beach is among the first in the area to formally request an exemption from the recent proposal. Southern Shores on the Outer Banks passed a similar resolution Feb. 1.

**CORRECTION: FEB. 10, 2018**

A public hearing on offshore drilling leases was rescheduled for Feb. 21 in Richmond. This story had incorrectly stated that the meeting happened last month.

Mechelle Hankerson, 757-222-5124,  
[michelle.hankerson@pilotonline.com](mailto:michelle.hankerson@pilotonline.com)

 1.5K  4  0  0  0  0 1.5K Shares

**Mechelle Hankerson**

Reporter

Mechelle Hankerson is a Virginia Beach native who covers the southern part of the city, public works and housing. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University and worked in Raleigh, N.C. before coming home to The Pilot.

[michelle.hankerson@pilotonline.com](mailto:michelle.hankerson@pilotonline.com)