Two bills blocking new offshore drilling pass through Appropriations Committees

by Dan Bacher

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Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi's Assembly Bill 1775 and Senator Hannah Beth Jackson’s Senate Bill 834, bills to protect the California coast from new federal offshore drilling leases, passed out of their respective Appropriations Committees today after being referred to the suspense file in April.

The Assembly and Senate committees both held hearings today on bills
that were referred to the suspense file. The two bills will now be eligible for floor votes in the Assembly and Senate next week.

“Woo hoo!” said Assemblymember Muratsuchi in a tweet. “My AB 1775 to fight Trump's offshore oil drilling plan passed Approps Committee! Onwards to floor vote! http://www.defendourcoast.com.”

“California’s economy thrives because of our environmental protection,” said Senator Jackson. “The Trump Administration’s reckless decision to open these waters to further oil development represents a step backward into the outdated, dirty and destructive energy policies of the past. It’s more important than ever that we send a strong statement that California will not be open for drilling along our coast, which could devastate our multi-trillion dollar coastal economy, our coastal waters and marine life,” said Jackson.

The bills, introduced in response to the Trump Administration’s announcement of their intention to expand offshore oil and gas drilling in federal waters by opening new federal leases, will ensure that pipelines and other infrastructure cannot be built in California waters to support any new federal oil development.

“The legislation will protect the California coast by prohibiting the State Lands Commission from approving any new leases for pipelines, piers, wharves, or other infrastructure needed to support new federal oil and gas development in the three-mile area off the coast that is controlled by the state. It would also prohibit any lease renewal, extension or modification that would support the production, transportation or processing of new oil
and gas,” according to Muratsuchi’s Office.

Senator Jackson’s Senate Bill 834 is the reintroduction of a bill that the Assemblymember co-authored with Senator Jackson last year that stalled in the Assembly Appropriations Committee, due to the avalanche of Big Oil lobbying money that hit the Capitol last year.

The oil industry is opposing both bills. The Western States Petroleum Association spent $2,025,000 to promote the Big Oil agenda, including opposing AB 1775 and SB 834, according to documents filed with the California Secretary of State on April 30: cal-access.sos.ca.gov/...

WSPA, the trade association for the oil industry in the states of California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada and Arizona, is the largest and most powerful corporate lobbying group in California.

A broad coalition of conservation, fishing, environmental justice and consumer groups and Tribes backs Jackson and Muratushi’s bills, while the Western States Petroleum Association, the California Chamber of Commerce and California Independent Petroleum Association and other oil industry supporters oppose the legislation.

Brown administration expands offshore drilling in state waters

The two bills don't specifically address oil drilling in state waters. In spite of California’s reputation as a “green leader,” the oil industry has overseen a big expansion in offshore drilling in state waters in recent years.
In February 2017, an analysis of Department of Conservation data by the Fracktracker Alliance revealed that Governor Jerry Brown’s oil and gas regulators approved 238 new offshore oil wells in state waters under existing leases off Los Angeles and Ventura counties from 2012 to 2016, an increase of 17 percent. Roughly 171 of them were still active as of a year ago: [http://www.fractracker.org/](http://www.fractracker.org/)

In 1994, the Legislature passed the California Coastal Sanctuary Act that prohibited new oil and gas leases in the state’s coastal waters, with some exceptions. Unfortunately, this prohibition on new oil and gas leases hasn’t halted the Brown administration’s massive expansion of new offshore wells in state waters under existing state leases.

A report published on May 22 by Oil Change International in collaboration with California-based and national environmental justice and climate groups reveals how California’s climate leadership requires a managed ramp-down of oil production. A review of state permitting records in the report “The Sky’s The Limit: California,” shows that more than 20,000 drilling permits have been issued during the Brown administration.

Background: Big Oil Money dominates California politics

California’s coastal economy produces approximately $44.5 billion in GDP each year and employs almost half a million people in the state, but that hasn’t stopped the oil industry from drilling new offshore wells that pose a great threat to the fish, wildlife and ecosystem of the state’s coastal waters.

That’s because Big Oil dominated three out of the four top spots of
expenditures by all lobbying organizations in 2017, the year that the oil industry-written AB 398 passed through the Legislature and Jackson’s bill blocking new federal offshore drilling went into the suspense file.

Outspending all of their competition, Chevron placed first with $8.2 million and the Western States Petroleum Association (WSPA) placed second with $6.2 million. Tesoro Refining and Marketing Company finished fourth with $3.2 million.

That’s a total of $17.6 million dumped into lobbying by the three top oil industry lobbying organizations alone. That figure exceeds the $14,577,314 expended by all 16 oil lobby organizations in 2016.

In a major conflict of interest that exemplifies Big Oil’s enormous influence over California’s environmental processes, Catherine Reheis-Boyd, the President of the Western States Petroleum Association, served as the chair of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative Blue Ribbon Task Force to create so-called “marine protected areas” in Southern California waters from 2009 to 2012. She also served on the task forces to create “marine protected areas” on the Central Coast, North Central Coast and North Coast from 2004 to 2012.

With a Big Oil lobbyist serving at the helm of a “marine protection” panel and Governor Jerry Brown’s oil and gas regulators approving 238 new offshore oil wells in state waters under existing leases from 2012 to 2016, it is very clear that California is very far being being the “green leader” that state officials claim that it is.
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