

Local lawmakers' views on the issues



Rep. Ken Roberson,
R-Punta Gorda



Rep. Paige Kreegel,
R-Punta Gorda



Rep. Nick Thompson,
R-Fort Myers



Rep. Gary Aubuchon,
R-Cape Coral



Rep. Trudi Williams,
R-Fort Myers



Sen. Mike Bennett,
R-Bradenton



Sen. Dave Aronberg,
D-Greenacres



Sen. Garrett Richter,
R-Naples

Offshore drilling

We need to continue the debate on offshore oil drilling. Any proposal to explore for energy off our coast needs to be conducted in a manner that is far enough, clean enough and safe enough so that it will protect our state's environmental treasures and not impact our tourism economy.

Kreegel is a member of the Legislature's committee for Florida's strategic future where the pros and cons are being considered. A risk benefit analysis is needed. "The jury is out and my mind is nowhere near made up," he said.

"We're still reviewing and taking testimony from the different groups about the positive economic impact and environmental impacts, Thompson said. "But I would support it if it can be done in an environmentally safe way."

I am listening to environmentalists, scientists, regulators, economists, industry interests and citizens. If we can balance the desire to benefit from our resources without harm to our environment or tourism, I will support giving the governor and Cabinet authority to decide the issue. If I am not convinced we can protect coastal interests, I will oppose exploration.

While Florida is a national leader in consuming energy, we produce little. Experts say Florida may have from 3 billion to 20 billion barrels of untapped energy in its waters. With a state-based royalty rate of 18.75 percent, Florida could collect \$1.5 billion or more, per year. By using our resources, Floridians could benefit from jobs created by removing the ban on exploration.

Bennett personally thinks offshore drilling is bad, but believes the legislature should get more information before committing to it.

Aronberg is opposed to the bill the legislature saw last year, which would allow drilling three miles off Florida's coasts. He believes the legislature should consider the consequences on the environment, Florida's economy and the military. "We need to slow down this rush to drill, baby, drill," he said.

A complete debate on offshore drilling will take into consideration 5 E's: energy, employment, environmental concerns, education and emotions. I believe the foremost of the above needs to be education. Lawmakers need to understand the technology and impact of offshore drilling and evaluate a cost/benefit analysis.