Should We Drill?

Weighing economic concerns against environmental ones

Large areas of U.S. coastal waters are set to be opened to offshore drilling for oil and natural gas. President Barack Obama says it was no easy decision to allow new offshore drilling in the Atlantic Ocean south of New Jersey, the Gulf of Mexico, and part of Alaska. His plan reverses a decades-long ban on drilling in areas other than the Gulf. People concerned about how much oil the U.S. buys from other countries and excited about the jobs oil and gas exploration may create say it is a step in the right direction. People concerned about the environmental damage drilling can cause are outraged. Read on to learn more. Then you decide!

YES

We'll Energize America

Oil fuels America. The fossil fuel powers cars, fuels power plants, and heats homes. Americans use 19.5 million barrels of oil each day. That is the most of any country in the world. The United States pumps some of its own oil, but it buys most of it from nations like Canada and Saudi Arabia.

Oil is big business. It is a $100 billion industry. Oil companies provide more than 100,000 jobs in the U.S. Geologists figure out the best places to drill for it. Then companies set up oil rigs—elaborate platforms—in the ground, or ocean for offshore operations, to find the oil. Hundreds of engineers, operators, and technicians are needed to work on a rig. Rigs also employ people like cooks, doctors, and cleaning staff to take care of the rig workers' needs.

Reducing America's need to buy oil from foreign countries and creating more U.S. jobs are major reasons that some people support President Obama's recent decision to expand offshore drilling. The perceived benefits may be years away, but supporters say Obama's move is a step in the right direction. "The President's decision will mean thousands of new jobs" for Virginia, says Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell. Virginia is one of the states affected by Obama's decision. "It will also help our nation take a further step towards energy independence," adds McDonnell.

Leaders in other states along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts see similar benefits.

"With record gas prices straining the budgets of many Georgia families, we cannot afford to take any option off the table," says Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue, a longtime supporter of offshore drilling.
NO

We'll Enter Dangerous Waters

Ducks and other water fowl covered in suffocating oil. Beaches damaged during the construction of needed oil rigs. Air and water pollution. Those are among the concerns critics have about President Obama's plan to open more of America's coastline to oil drilling.

"This is not a decision that I've made lightly," Obama says. The President says he had to balance the need to protect America's natural resources with the country's increasing need for energy and jobs. Offshore drilling is one part of a larger energy plan, according to Obama. Ultimately, the President says, he wants to end the country's dependence on fossil fuels--like oil--and on foreign sources of those fuels. His aim is cleaner energy--like wind power--and greater use of oil and gas found in U.S. waters.

Many environmental groups and lawmakers are not happy about the drilling. They say the risks to the environment outweigh any benefits. They believe the President should focus on pushing Americans toward cleaner, renewable energy, instead of continuing to support the use of oil and other fossil fuels. Even in states like New Jersey, where offshore drilling will not take place, there is concern about toxins brought there by wind and waves.

"It makes no sense to threaten the East Coast of America...with spills and other drilling disasters when we're about to unleash the real solutions to energy dependence--cleaner cars, cleaner fuels, and clean energy," says Doug O'Malley of Environment New Jersey.