

This week the Obama Administration announced a new direction for offshore energy development for Virginia and the nation. The President's announcement is a step in the right direction and ensures that Virginia will be a leader in environmentally responsible offshore energy production.

The plan, though, only opens a fraction of what was originally proposed in the 2010-2015 lease plan and reinstates the moratorium on significant portions of Atlantic and Pacific coastal areas and specific areas in Bristol Bay Alaska. The announcement also confirms the delay in plans to drill in the Atlantic off of Virginia's coast until 2012 – discarding a lease sale that was scheduled to take place next year.

Despite these shortcomings, the plan does set the stage for a lease sale to take place offshore of Virginia in 2012 and for future environmentally responsible oil and gas development. Virginia has the opportunity to develop offshore energy in an environmentally friendly manner and lead the nation in improving our energy security and creating thousands of jobs. The economy of Virginia will benefit tremendously from the demand for goods and services created by offshore development.

In order to fully capitalize on Virginia's energy development potential, action needs to be taken to ensure fair and reasonable compensation to states that move forward with energy production. I along with Congressman Bob Goodlatte and a bipartisan delegation of Virginia members introduced legislation to ensure royalty and revenue sharing arrangements in a manner equivalent to the energy producing Gulf Coast states. This legislation would ensure that revenues and royalties generated from Virginia coastal waters would be split between the federal government and the state. The Commonwealth could use its share of revenue to fund transportation, education, alternative energy and environmental restoration projects.

Finally, any energy development offshore must be coordinated and planned to coexist with existing federal and commercial activity. Currently, Virginia's offshore waters are active U.S. Navy training waters and NASA testing sites. As a member of the Armed Services and Natural Resources Committees I will work to ensure that energy development and generation efforts on the outer continental shelf are coordinated so they do not inhibit our national security readiness requirements and energy security missions.

Promoting offshore oil and gas development is one tool in an “all of the above” energy strategy that is necessary to meet our nation’s growing needs. In addition to oil and gas, Virginia has the potential to develop offshore windmills and other types of renewable energy. All of these forms of energy are necessary to meet the challenges of the 21st Century.

I look forward to continuing to move Virginia towards energy independence, offshore energy development and job creation.

*Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.*