

## NJ lawmakers demand moratorium on East Coast drilling

BY KIRK MOORE • GANNETT NEW JERSEY • April 30, 2010

OCEAN GROVE — New Jersey lawmakers are using the spreading Deepwater Horizon oil spill to attack the Obama administration's offshore drilling policy, warning that the Gulf of Mexico disaster clearly shows the danger to Shore beaches if new drilling is allowed off the coast of Virginia.

"We have been saying for some time to the "drill, baby, drill" crowd that this is not in the interests of the United States," said Sen. Robert Menendez, D-NJ, at a seaside news conference where he and others called for a return to the federal moratorium on East Coast petroleum leasing.

At a flow now estimated at 210,000 gallons a day, the leaking well "in two months will have exceeded the amount spilled in the Exxon Valdez disaster" on the coast of Alaska in 1989, Menendez said.

"We saw what happened here in 1988...when the beaches were closed because of medical waste and sewage sludge," said Rep. Frank Pallone Jr., D-NJ. The possible damage to the coastal economy that's worth \$50 billion in annual economic activity is not worth the potential discovery of limited oil reserves, Pallone said.

"If this happened off the Virginia coast, we'd be toast," added Cynthia Zipf of the environmental group Clean Ocean Action.

Lawmakers and activists applauded the start of the Fishermen's Energy project, with the launch this week of an environmental monitoring buoy to prepare for the installation of eight experimental turbines 2.8 miles off Atlantic City. If the project continues on its current path with support from the state government construction will begin by 2012 or as early as next year, said Fishermen's Energy president Daniel Cohen

Menendez, Pallone, state Sen. Frank Lautenberg and Rep. Rush Holt said they welcomed the White House's assurance Friday that no additional offshore drilling will be authorized until an

investigation of that accident is completed. But they said the president should go further and reverse his March 31 proposal to allow more offshore drilling.

The letter, signed by all four lawmakers, said New Jersey should not become "the next test case for the oil companies' experiment in how to maximize profits and minimize regulations."

The White House says Obama will visit central New Jersey on Wednesday.

**The Associated Press contributed to this report.**