



## Make sure jobs don't go to foreign companies

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### Will increase in offshore drilling result in more jobs for Americans?

By KEN WELLS

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The Obama administration's announcement to expand offshore energy markets should be particularly welcome news for Mobile, which ought to be one of the first areas to benefit from new drilling in the Eastern Gulf.

It should be good news for the Alabama companies that own the vessels that work in offshore energy, the local shipyards that build them, the mariners who work on them and the grocery stores that put the food in the galleys.

Mobile should be enthusiastic about the shot in the arm that this could be for the local economy.

But not so fast.

We are concerned that, unless the president makes sure all of his agencies are on the same page about creating jobs for Americans, the jobs that will come from this new drilling will be jobs for foreign mariners working on foreign boats.

By way of background, Americans working in the offshore energy market have a tremendous impact on local and state economies, as well as the national bottom line.

A recent study commissioned by the Offshore Marine Service Association indicates that U.S. vessels involved in offshore energy, the shipyards that build them and the companies that assist them create more than 100,000 American jobs on the water and on shore, producing more than \$18 billion in business sales activities and \$4.6 billion in household earnings per year.

Given Mobile's long maritime history, this impact is especially important in Alabama.

The problem is, one hand of the administration doesn't seem to know what the other hand is doing. While the president is talking jobs, a regulatory hold-up within his Department of Homeland Security could mean the jobs associated with this offshore expansion work could go to foreign and not American workers.

There are laws in place to keep foreign vessels from working in our domestic maritime trade. The Jones Act says that cargo transported from one place within the United States to another may only be carried on a vessel that is built in America and owned and crewed by Americans.

Unfortunately, over the past few years, our own government has misinterpreted the Jones Act in ways that have allowed an increasing number of foreign vessels to perform work in the U.S. offshore energy industry, costing Americans jobs and thwarting our U.S. economy of income and tax revenues.

The Customs and Border Protection Agency, a part of DHS, appeared ready to address that problem last summer when it proposed returning to the original intent of the Jones Act and to dramatically limit the ability of foreign vessels carrying cargo between our shores and our offshore energy sites.

But since last summer, that proposal has been sitting idle in DHS while opponents of the law argued to keep from having to use American-crewed, American vessels. Just recently DHS said it would move forward with the proposal but needed to use a formal — and much longer — rulemaking process to do so.

Instead of addressing the problem now, this process may delay a solution for months. Some rulemaking processes have dragged on for years. Why would the administration need to take even one more day to study a law that keeps Americans working, especially when it wishes to expand the offshore market in the near future?

If we are going to continue to see the positive impact on our nation's economy from the expansion we must ensure that the offshore work is performed on U.S.-flag vessels that are built in America, and owned and crewed by Americans.

These U.S. companies need a commitment from Washington that it is willing to properly interpret and enforce the laws that protect American mariners from unfair competition by their foreign counterparts.

***Ken Wells is president of the Offshore Marine Service Association, headquartered in Harrahan, La. His e-mail address is kenwells@offshoremarine.org.***

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