



## Offshore Oil Support Up with Each Gas Dollar

Dave Hodges  
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Without much fanfare but some wincing as I activated the pump, I purchased my first \$4+ gallons of gasoline a few days ago.

Chances are you have, too. Now, there are stations selling fuel at \$3.98 a gallon or thereabouts, but when you *really* need to gas up, you have to choose the best deal from among the stations where you happen to be. It's a trade-off.

I'm reminded of another trade-off when it comes to drilling for more oil in our own country. At a rate of about 22 million barrels a day, the U.S. is the largest single petroleum consumer. That's about three times more oil per day than we produce.

Yes, I think we should make the wisest use we can of this resource and conserve where possible. It's also encouraging to see that the economics of the oil market have heightened interest in other energy types and have had an effect on consumer behavior and choices.

Oil is still king, however. No amount of conservation will solve the supply problem, especially when you factor in a rising population and its transportation needs. The federal government's Energy Information Administration says the nation now has 210 million motor vehicles and they are driven more than 7 billion miles per day. That demand is not going away.

This week Associated Industries of Florida announced the results of a survey conducted by InsiderAdvantage/Poll Position that revealed more than 60 percent of Florida respondents favor increased exploration and production of oil and natural gas off the coasts of our state.

Additionally, 66 percent of respondents were willing to allow the search for natural resources to move closer to Florida's shores — from anywhere the resources can be found to at least 50 miles from the shore. Thirty-two percent of respondents were opposed to increased exploration. AIF said the poll sampled 685 registered Florida voters. The margin of error was 3.6 percent.

Barney Bishop, president and CEO of AIF, says the poll results indicate that Floridians are ready to look closer to our shores for natural resources that will increase production of domestic oil and natural gas. While the state's coastline is critical to tourism, people are apparently weighing the risks and alternatives and deciding the trade-off is worth it.

Incidentally, more than half of those polled felt it was unfair that Cuba was able to legally drill for oil and natural gas halfway to Key West, while American energy companies were restricted to exploration 125 miles from Florida's coast.

I believe we can't have it both ways. We can't gripe about \$4+ gas and demand that there be less dependence on foreign oil — the drumbeat heard for decades — and still do nothing to boost domestic production.

And "do nothing" has been the case for too long. That's where the real risk lies. As a nation, we wagered that we could continue to have reliable, reasonably priced petroleum available for our businesses and communities. The current situation proves how wrong we were.

With our economy continuing to demand conventional fuels and foreign producers showing no inclination to boost their oil production, it's time to produce more of our own.