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Obama OKs Oil Exploration Along Atlantic Coast, But Not Drilling

By Devin Dwyer

ABC News

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The Obama administration today endorsed new oil and gas exploration along the Atlantic Coast, setting the stage for possible future drilling lease sales.

The announcement by the Interior Department sets into motion what will be at least a five year environmental survey to determine whether and where oil production might occur.

It also comes as President Obama faces mounting pressure over high gas prices and criticism from Republicans that he has opposed more drilling for oil.

“Making decisions based on sound science, public input and the best information available is a critical component to this administration’s all-of-the-above energy strategy,” said Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

But Republicans say the announcement is simply for show. Obama delayed and then cancelled a planned 2011 drilling lease sale for areas off the Virginia coast following the BP oil spill in the Gulf.

There are also no guarantees the administration will approve drilling permits at the end of the environmental review.

“The president’s actions have closed an entire new area to drilling on his watch and cheats Virginians out of thousands of jobs,” said Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., who chairs the House Natural Resources Committee.

The announcement “continues the president’s election-year political ploy of giving speeches and talking about drilling after having spent the first three years in office blocking, delaying and driving up the cost of producing energy in America,” he said.

“If President Obama truly wanted to support energy production in the Atlantic, he would immediately reinstate the lease sale that he canceled.”

House Republicans say approving drilling off the Virginia coast would create at least 2,000

jobs and produce 750 million barrels of oil.

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