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# Save, Baby, Save: A Barrel Saved Is a Barrel Not Needed -- Ever

by George Lakoff

The Death Gusher in the Gulf should tell us to end offshore drilling forever.

The reason is simple: [Systemic risk](#)!

Better regulations won't end what went wrong: Corporate greed, cutting corners to save money, lack of coordination among subcontractors, unforeseen factors, and just plain incompetence in private industry. Add that to isolated deep drilling sites in deep ocean where no human being can go, bad weather, and oil exploding out at 10,000 pounds per square inch, and you will virtually guarantee more Death Gushers.

Do we really need that oil? Could we make do with none of it?

With money, "A penny saved is a penny earned," as Ben Franklin noted. But saving oil -- not needing or using it -- is a much better deal: it is cumulative.

An alternative exists, though it is badly named: "energy efficiency" and "conservation" miss the general point. A high percentage of oil and fossil fuels are wasted. Huge efficiency gains per barrel are immediately possible with the right investments. What is missed is the most basic of truths. Oil savings keep accumulating.

Take insulating a building. It will save a certain number of barrels of oil this year. And the same number next year. And the year after that, and after that, year-after-year! The barrels of oil saved multiply! Without the insulation, those barrels of oil would have to be drilled year-after-year, drill and drill and drill versus save and save and save. Every year, as energy is saved, fewer barrels are needed.

Moreover, offshore drilling is very expensive, even without death gushers. And it takes time - year after year. What if that cost and that time were invested cumulatively in NOT using oil? Suppose we ended offshore drilling and re-invested the equivalent amount of money and time in forms of "energy efficiency." Would that offset the number of barrels drilled?

**The Mismeasure of Energy Efficiency**

The Department of Energy has misframed the energy efficiency issue. The calculation made is in money, not in barrels of oil saved. How many **barrels of oil** will the 2010 energy efficiency programs save not only in 2010, but in 2011, 2012, and so on ... for, say, the next 30 years. And if we putting the drilling investments into all the job-creating ways of saving energy, how many barrels will be saved on 2011's energy efficiency programs over the following 30 years. And so on. Will those multiplied, accumulated savings tell us that we don't need to do offshore drilling after all? Or that we can cut it down significantly? And how many jobs will be created? Real, good-paying, non-exportable jobs!

We need to know. As soon as possible.

It may be the case that ending offshore drilling is good, not bad, for the economy - and the future of the world.

Secretary Chu, please add up our energy efficiency savings in terms of barrels of oil saved, with cumulative estimates over the next 30 or so years.

I make this suggestion with the greatest respect for programs already in motion from energy efficiency and conservation funding.

- Development of an energy efficiency and conservation strategy
- Building energy audits and retrofits, including weatherization
- Financial incentive programs for energy efficiency such as energy savings
- Performance contracting, on-bill financing, and revolving loan funds
- Transportation programs to conserve energy
- Building code development, implementation, and inspections
- Installation of distributed energy technologies including combined heat and power and district heating and cooling systems
- Material conservation programs including source reduction, recycling, and recycled content procurement programs
- Reduction and capture of greenhouse gas emissions generated by landfills or similar waste-related sources
- Installation of energy efficient traffic signals and street lighting
- Installation of renewable energy technologies on government buildings
- Any other appropriate activity that meets the purposes of the program and is approved by DOE

Add to that all the many ways that oil is used in agriculture and could be saved -- fertilizers and pesticides could be eliminated by organic farming methods, as well as transportation fuel that could be eliminated by the localization of food production. Instead of investing in offshore oil, we should be investing in *not needing oil*. Think

about greening our long-term infrastructure -- our buildings, our cars, our public transportation, our industry, our military bases, our homes. It saves a certain number of barrels of oil right away, barrels that need not be drilled the first year. And it keeps saving that many barrels of oil every year. That means that the yearly oil-barrel savings accumulate; and less and less oil has to be drilled.

Meanwhile, good meaningful jobs increase here, green jobs that cannot be outsourced. The economy does not lose, it benefits. And so do we all -- no risk of future offshore oil-drilling disasters, a serious move to lessen climate change and abate future climate disasters (e.g., hurricanes), a cleaner environment.

This, of course, means a decrease in oil company profits. Unless the oil companies seriously invest in the development of alternative fuels and oil-saving industries.

The Gulf Oil-drilling Disaster should teach us many things, among them:

Corporations are too greedy, too powerful, and all too often incompetent.

We cannot depend on oil companies to protect us and our environment.

There is no way around it; oil is dirty, morally as well physically.

We are told that oil from offshore drilling is necessary, as we transition to new forms of energy. But that estimate does not include the cumulative year-after-year savings *of not needing oil*. Imagine this: Instead of investments in the cost of drilling in the deep ocean and subsidizing oil companies, instead of paying for oil year after year, invest in jobs that would eliminate oil needs, as suggested by the energy department programs listed above.

Money is fungible: A penny saved is a penny earned.

Oil is cumulatively fungible: A barrel saved is a barrel not needed, year after year after year.

The lesson of the Death Gusher is clear: SAVE, BABY, SAVE!