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Daily News

Freeport defense flying
under the radar
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Topsail
surveying
set to
begin
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NOVEMBER 24, 2009

TUESDAY

75 cents daily

Drilling faces tough sell in Senate

By **BILL COTTERELL**
Gannett Florida Capital Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — The push for the Florida Legislature to approve near-shore Gulf Coast drilling in its 2010 session is like oil exploration itself — surveys and projections, expert opinions, test wells to take the political pulse and throwing around plenty of money in search of a gusher that ends in a positive vote.

As things stand now, it is likely proponents will hit a dry hole, at least in the immediate future. But, as with wild-catting, a surprise strike is possible.

The House earlier this year voted 70-43, almost precisely on party lines, to explore drilling in state waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Senate President Jeff Atwater then refused to take up the matter.

Four months out from the start of next spring's regular legislative session, it appears drilling legislation still would pass in the House. And Atwater still appears unlikely to move the legislation through the Senate.

In 2011, the situation could be different because two main proponents will lead the House and Senate.

In the 2008 presidential campaign,

Gov. Charlie Crist startled environmentalists who had supported him by echoing Sen. John McCain's "drill here, drill now" call, but he has backtracked as a U.S. Senate candidate.

His mantra now is that oil and gas exploration must be "clean enough, safe enough and far enough" off shore not to interfere with the state's tourism economy.

Atwater, a Palm Beach County Republican running for chief financial officer, threw cold water on drilling talks at the beginning of November,

PLEASE SEE DRILLING | A2

Oil & Water		
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TODAY
Texas has drilling within sight of its gulf beaches. What's the experience there?	What would drilling mean to Northwest Florida's military? Which candidates are benefiting?	How will the proposal play out? Action expected in Tallahassee and Washington, D.C.
ON THE NET Read previous drilling stories at nwfdailynews.com .		INSIDE If Florida lifts ban, feds might follow A2

CHOCTAW TO MARCH IN MACY'S PARADE



Photos by **NICK TOMECEK** | Daily News

Mallory Maughon twirls her flag while practicing with the rest of the Choctawhatchee Stylemarchers for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. **Below**, the Choctawhatchee High School Stylemarchers practice recently for their big performance.

PAINTING THE TOWN GREEN

By **KATIE TAMMEN**
Northwest Florida Daily News
315-4440 | katie@nwfdailynews.com

FORT WALTON BEACH — After almost two years of waiting, the moment is almost here.

Thursday morning, the Choctawhatchee High School Stylemarchers will perform in front of millions of people during the 83rd annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City.

The second high school band to perform in the parade lineup, the Stylemarchers are scheduled to appear right between Tom Turkey and Kermit the Frog at 9:03 a.m. CST on NBC, band director Chad Hannah said.

The 181 students left Sunday on five buses for New York and will stay through Friday.

In addition to their performance, they will take time to explore some of the sights, including a performance on Broadway.

"It's hard to believe it's actually going to happen," drum major Delcie Savedra said.



Initially, Hannah decided the band would play "Don't Rain on my Parade" during the parade, but Hannah wasn't satisfied he had found the best song for the students.

Eventually, he said, he came across an arrangement of "Defying Gravity" from the Broadway musical "Wicked," which the students were to see the night before the parade, and he knew he had found the right song.

Unfortunately, the people at Macy's,

PLEASE SEE PAINTING THE TOWN | A2

INSIDE

• South Walton teen to perform at parade finale | A3
• New route cuts no corners | A11

ON THE NET

See more photos and video of the band at nwfdailynews.com.

FWB man gets 20 years for shooting family friend

Willard also fired at Eglin security before he was shot in abdomen March 17

By **TOM McLAUGHLIN**
Northwest Florida Daily News
315-4435 | tom@nwfdailynews.com

Ron Willard, who chased down and shot a family friend, then fired on law enforcement officers attempting to subdue him, was sentenced Monday to 20 years in prison.

The sentence was the minimum mandatory under the law and Circuit Court Judge John Brown said he didn't opt for a longer term because Willard was suicidal and "in the throes of passion," when the shooting occurred.

Brown said he also took into account an outpouring of support for Willard.

"I have read numerous letters. All are supportive of you and certainly speak highly of you, except for in this one isolated incident," Brown said.

Even Jason Ward, the man shot by Willard, testified Monday on the defendant's behalf.

Another factor weighing in the Fort Walton Beach man's behalf was a pre-sentencing report that indicated shots he fired toward officers who chased him onto Eglin property "appear to have been motivated to affect his own death."

Willard pleaded no contest to charges filed following a March 17 incident in which he fired five shots at Ward during a car chase through Willard's neighborhood.

Investigators said the chase started when Ward dropped off Willard's wife at 3 a.m. Ward told them he waited to see Michaela Willard make it home safely, but looked up to see Willard driving at him at high speed.

Ward was shot in the shoulder during the car chase.

Willard drove from the shooting scene to Eglin reservation.

He was eventually spotted, on foot, by two Air Force security officers with a search dog.

"Both officers challenged Willard; (Tech



RON WILLARD

PLEASE SEE SHOOTING | A2

NORTHWEST FLORIDA
6'0"
5'5"
5'0"
ARREST MUGSHOTS
nwfdailynews.com

HERE'S WHERE TO FIND YOUR FAVORITE CONTENT

BUSINESS	B8	LOTTERY	B3
CLASSIFIED	B9-12	MOVIES	B6
COMICS	B7	OBITUARIES	A3
DEAR ABBY	B6	PUZZLES	B6-7
EDITORIALS	A8	SPORTS	B1-5

COMMENT OF THE DAY

Was it absolutely necessary to shoot the bear? Was there really no other option?

READ WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING | A2

WEATHER

Areas of morning fog, then partly sunny.
High 69; low 53.
Waves 1 to 3 feet.
Gulf temp. 66.

Visibility 5+ miles | B5



2 SECTIONS
24 PAGES

A Freedom newspaper read by **94,200** people every day



Fort Walton Beach, Fla.,
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Spout Off

Here's what some folks on the Emerald Coast are thinking today:

Looks like Big Oil and developers will do more to impede Eglin's mission than Valparaiso ever could. Where is the outrage?

The financial threat to this great nation is far greater than the military threat. It is time to muzzle the sucking sound of U.S. dollars going to oil-producing nations.

Offshore drilling in Florida? No problem. I'm sure the tar balls will blend in with the cigarette butts and bottle caps.

I am just sick about the death of the mother bear. She was just trying to feed her cubs. We have pushed the bears out of their natural habitat and wonder why they invade our space.

A man is justified under the law to shoot to kill another human being if he is in fear for his life or great bodily harm. So why should it be different because it's a bear? Are you going to stand there and let a bear take a swipe at you with his paw?

Whether a threat or not, it was inevitable that someone would end up shooting the mama bear. They have been frequent visitors to the area for a couple of months. Next time, maybe the Fish and Wildlife folks will consider relocating bears because the threat to their lives is greater than that of the people who live in the area.

The poor Destin Snowbird Club. By my math and the numbers published in the article on Monday, the 2,000 snowbirds are spending \$12,500 to \$17,500 a month while they are here. With this kind of disposable income, they should be able to afford to donate to their own club.

Senators made a big deal about working on a Saturday to pass this abortion of a health care bill. Wow, I'm impressed they can work on a weekend.

Valparaiso Elementary students are learning a silent language. Maybe our congressmen and women should learn as well — not to sign, just to shut up.

Want to Spout Off?
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NORTHWEST FLORIDA

Daily News

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Audit Bureau of Circulation and MORI research

63rd Year No. 298

The Chevron Genesis Oil Rig Platform in the Gulf of Mexico near New Orleans, La., is seen Aug. 19.



AP

If Florida lifts ban, feds might follow

By JIM ASH
Gannett Florida Capital Bureau Chief

TALLAHASSEE — The immediate debate in the Legislature is about drilling in waters controlled by the state in the narrow band up to 10.3 miles from the coast.

But the real prize might lie farther out, in the waters of the outer continental shelf controlled by the federal government, also subject to a ban put in place by Congress in 2006. That moratorium, already the subject of federal debate, would be in serious trouble if Florida opens up its own waters.

The oil industry contends — although critics seriously question it — there are 3 billion barrels of oil waiting to be pumped, if and when the Florida Legislature lifts a two-decade ban on drilling in state waters, within 3 to 10 miles from shore.

That is just a drop in the bucket compared with the 14.4 billion barrels of oil the Minerals Management Service estimates is available off the nation's Atlantic and Pacific coasts where drilling has been banned by Congress since 1981.

In the Eastern Gulf of Mexico, another federal ban puts another 3.7 billion barrels of oil out of reach. Just 25 miles off the coast of Pensacola, a deposit that could produce 165 billion cubic feet of natural gas a year for the next 20 years also has been off limits, according to the industry estimates.

If the Florida Legislature lifts the ban in state waters, the industry and offshore drilling proponents in Congress will be watching closely.

“Certainly, the rationale for the moratoria goes away,” said Denise McCourt, industry relations director for the American Petroleum Institute. “Just by having the discussion, people are noticing. The poll numbers we’re seeing are enough to knock your socks off.”

Former President George W. Bush did not renew an annual drilling ban in the 2008 federal budget. In February, U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced he was taking a go-slow approach before approving new exploration. He scheduled a series of hearings that will last six months.

A compromise bill pushed by U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Orlando, bans drilling in a swath of the eastern Gulf of Mexico about 125 miles from the Florida Panhandle, and 235 miles from most of Florida's west coast, including a military exclusion line that runs south from Destin. It expires in 2022 and can be changed at any time.

Even though the original moratorium has lapsed, drilling cannot happen until Congress agrees to give the Minerals Management Service the money it needs to initiate a new leasing program.

“There are still many members in Congress who are entrenched,” acknowledged Aaron Saunders, a spokesman for U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, a Democrat from Louisiana and drilling supporter who has pushed for gulf states to take a greater share of federal royalties. “If Florida acts, it would send a signal to Congress that coastal states are ready.”

And if Florida lifts its drilling ban, Nelson warns that his holding action to “preserve national security” by keeping the military exclusion line would crumble.

He said he suspects the industry is pushing drilling in state waters, not to tap a resource he is convinced is not there, but to bolster its push in Congress.

He points to the history of Coastal Petroleum to bolster his case. The company drilled 19 test wells and came up dry before the state paid millions of dollars to buy out its leases in state waters.

“Of course there's no oil,” Nelson said. “Look at how many dry holes they dug.”

Eric Draper, acting executive director of Audubon of Florida and a chief drilling opponent, does not buy the theory that the industry push in the Florida Legislature is a feint.

The drive is being led by Florida Energy Associates, a group that refuses to disclose all of its members but one that describes itself as a bunch of wildcat drillers.

“There's probably not much oil out there, but there is still an economic interest in holding the leases,” Draper said.

Dave Mica, executive director of the Florida Petroleum Council, said the effort in the Florida Legislature is a sincere effort. Bill sponsors are focused on Florida resources, he said, not on sending a message to Congress.

“I've never talked to a single legislator who's said that,” Mica said. “I tell them, ‘Pass this, and you'll change the world.’ ”

PAINTING THE TOWN

who must pre-approve musical selections, didn't agree to the change. Not ready to accept no as an answer, Hannah called the Macy's officials again and eventually got the green light.

“I figured it would be a lot more meaningful to the kids,” said Hannah, who became band director a year ago after 10 years as the assistant band director.

Savedra, who plays the trumpet, said the band is ready for the performance but maybe not the weather.

“I don't think we're ready for the cold yet,” the senior said with a laugh as she stood in the school parking lot last Friday evening before a final rehearsal.

As of Monday afternoon, the National Weather Service was predicting light rain and a high temperature of about 57 degrees Thanksgiving Day in New York City.

The band learned they would participate in this year's parade about 18 months ago when two representatives from Macy's arrived at their school with confetti and the announcement.

The road to the parade has been a long one, filled with fundraisers, after-school jobs and, beginning in September, extra hours of rehearsal.

The most difficult part, Savedra said, is adjusting to the fact they will not be performing on a football field. They have less space and have to walk in straight lines without guidance.

Thursday will be only the second time in more than 20 years that Choctaw performs in the famous parade.

“It's an incredible opportunity, and we're excited and honored to be there,” Principal Cindy Gates said.

SHOOTING

Sgt. Hector Barrios) stated that his challenge was ‘Eglin Security Police, show us your hands,’ ” Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office Investigator Robert Grappone wrote in Willard's arrest report.

Rather than surrendering, Willard dropped a bag he was carrying, “produced an Olympic M-4 assault rifle and pointed it at the officers,” the report states.

“A firefight ensued in which over 50 rounds were fired,” the report states.

Willard fired 11 shots before his gun jammed and he attempted to run away. He was shot in the abdomen.

Officers said he had another rifle, two handguns and several hundred rounds of ammunition in his car at the time of his arrest.

Willard received 20 years for aggravated battery by discharging a weapon, 15 years for shooting into an occupied vehicle, 15 years for attempting to elude a law enforcement officer and 20 years for each of two counts of aggravated assault on a police officer.

The sentences will be served concurrently.

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