

# Rubio, Scott push to extend oil, gas moratorium

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An F-35A Lightning II test aircraft from the 31st Test Evaluation Squadron at Edwards Air Force Base, California, releases a missile over the Gulf of Mexico during a live-fire test in 2018. Florida Sens. Marco Rubio and Rick Scott have filed an amendment to energy legislation now making its way through the U.S. Senate that would extend an oil and gas exploration moratorium in the eastern Gulf of Mexico to help protect military testing missions. [U.S. AIR FORCE]

air combat training, air-to-air missile testing, drone targeting, hypersonic weapons testing and space launches, among a range of testing and training activities.

Currently, oil and gas leasing are prohibited within 125 miles of the Florida coastline under the federal Gulf of Mexico Energy and Security Act of 2006. That ban is set to expire in 2022, although the U.S. House has passed legislation that would establish a permanent moratorium.

The Senate has not acted on the proposal for a permanent moratorium, making the amendment proposed by Rubio and Scott, both Republicans, a potential compromise.

Locally, U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz., whose congressional district includes Eglin, has made the Gulf Test Range his top legislative priority. His commitment was on display at the Defense Leadership Forum's Air Force Contracting Summit held Jan. 30-31 in Miramar Beach.

During a speech to hundreds of contractors, military personnel and local officials, Gaetz said the test range is a crucial component in attracting military funding and related economic development to the area.

Gaetz also made the point that missile testing — in particular, the development of hypersonic missiles, which travel at multiple times the speed of sound — is incompatible with oil and gas exploration.

In a bit of foreshadowing of current legislative action on the moratorium, Gaetz told his Jan. 31 audience,

WASHINGTON — Both of Florida's U.S. senators have been pushing an amendment to an energy bill now working its way through Congress that would extend a moratorium on oil and gas exploration in the eastern Gulf of Mexico for ten years beyond its current expiration in 2022.

The moratorium is important to the future of the Eglin Gulf Test and Training Range. The military test range, covering 120,000 square miles — most of which lies in the eastern Gulf of Mexico — is used by all branches of the U.S. military for various testing and training purposes.

The range is managed by the 96th Test Wing, the host unit at Eglin Air Force Base. It accommodates

“Please encourage our senators to get that moratorium extension into some must-pass bill.”

According to media reports, the amendment proposed by Rubio and Scott is far from the only amendment proposed for the American Energy Innovation Act. Sponsored by Sens. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, and Joe Manchin, D-West Virginia, the bill is designed to prompt research across an array of energy options.

The bill had been expected to pass the Senate relatively quickly, but the array of amendments has slowed progress on the legislation, which must make its way through the House of Representatives following Senate action.

In addition to the oil and gas exploration amendment, other amendments to the bill call for capping tax credits for electric vehicle purchases, raise royalty fees on mining companies and halt any changes to the National Environmental Policy Act.