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## Off-shore drilling pros, cons explored

By CATHERINE DOLINSKI

[cdolinski@tampatrib.com](mailto:cdolinski@tampatrib.com)

Only one in a hundred offshore drilling leases may produce oil, and there's no guarantee that near-shore drilling will bring big bucks to Florida.

Those were just a couple of the observations a team of academic and industry experts offered Monday when they came together at Florida State University for a three-hour forum on offshore energy.

Florida's past history of oil drilling in state waters offshore - before the state banned it two decades ago - and the known existence of its onshore oil resources are promising indicators about the potential for drilling in state waters again.

But "there are more unknowns than there are knowns," said Ian MacDonald, oceanography professor at Florida State University.

Fundamental geological differences mean Florida cannot assume it will have Louisiana's and Texas' experience with oil and gas production, MacDonald said between panel discussions.

"This is a different region ... without the major sedimentation that you see in the central Gulf of Mexico," he said. "There may be oil and gas; it may be uneconomical, in present circumstances, to produce it."

Kenneth Schaudt, an oceanographer and meteorologist who has consulted for the oil industry, said it would likewise be speculative at this point to predict the number of jobs that could arise from drilling in Florida waters.

Offshore drilling is a hot topic at the Capitol, where influential lawmakers are proposing to lift the state's longstanding ban on oil and gas exploration in Florida's Gulf waters, up to 10 miles from the coast.

Dave Cartes, director of the FSU energy institute that organized the event, promoted its participants as objective, "honest brokers" of information. The event, which cost \$50 per attendee, was free of special interest sponsors or donations, Cartes said.

That wasn't enough, however for some drilling opponents, who complained the event slanted in favor of the oil industry. The majority of experts came from oil-producing states; some work at academic institutions supported by oil companies. At least two of the participants have worked for the oil and gas industry.

Audubon Society of Florida lobbyist Eric Draper, who did not attend the event, complained that even Cartes has spoken in favor of offshore drilling around Florida.

Prior to the forum's start, Cartes told reporters that "we need natural gas." Eventually, he said, "Florida is going to have to see drilling."