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**SENATORS DEUTCH AND ARONBERG CRAFT LEGISLATION TO KEEP FLORIDA'S
COASTLINE IN FLORIDA'S HANDS**

TALLAHASSEE – Concerned by last minute legislative attempts and intense efforts by advocates to lift Florida's long standing ban on offshore oil drilling, state Senators Dave Aronberg (D-Greenacres) and Ted Deutch (D-Boca Raton) on Wednesday announced legislation to ensure that the future of Florida's coastline remains in Florida's hands.

“We must give careful consideration to the impact drilling will have on our coastal communities and the state's economy,” said Sen. Deutch. “It is imperative that we take the necessary precautions to protect Florida's natural resources while at the same time being mindful of the impact a potential modification of the drilling ban could have on our economy.”

“We have not adequately explored the possible repercussions that could

result from taking such swift actions,” said Sen. Aronberg. “This is a complex issue that deserves careful review and consideration by the Legislature and the people of Florida.”

At the heart of the legislation is what remains missing from the arguments proposed by drilling advocates during the 2009 legislative session: the complete picture.

Designed to present a more thorough panorama of what oil drilling would mean to the residents of Florida, the legislation will create the Florida Energy Independence and Coastal Protection Task Force, a group dedicated to studying the issue and reporting on the economic and environmental impacts of and alternatives to lifting the ban on allowing oil drilling in Florida waters.

“Recent proposals to lift Florida’s decades old ban on oil and natural gas exploration and drilling in state waters raise questions of state energy policy, risks to our tourism-based economy and potential economic and state revenue benefits,” said Sen. Deutch.

“Questions of policy, benefits and risks should be answered through objective and independent evaluation, and conclusions should not be reached prior to careful consideration and deliberation.”

The Task Force will consist of nine nongovernmental members and three members appointed by the Governor, two by the President of the Senate, two by the Speaker of the House, one by the Senate Minority Leader and one by the House Minority Leader. There will also be several ex-officio designees from various government agencies.

The Task Force, which will meet throughout the state, will hold public hearings and convene technical advisory committees to examine the range of issues that should be considered before a decision is made regarding the ban.

The group must hold its first meeting by January 15, 2010 and issue a final report by December 15, 2010.

Filing of the bill creating the Task Force is currently pending the governor's decision on whether to include offshore drilling in any possible special session before the start of the 2010 Legislative Session.

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