

Drilling Should Be Suspended

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The massive, continuing oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico should remind us that the development and use of virtually all forms of energy entails significant risks – and sound risk management requires measures to reduce those risks. Accidents happen; but given the devastating damage from this instance, yes, Washington should suspend new deep water drilling in places that are especially environmentally sensitive, at least until we have in hand much better ways to contain the destruction from such accidents. Since we all have stakes in both preserving the environment and securing domestic supplies of energy, the government should support and assist the industry in developing faster and more effective responses. The incident isn't likely to affect the current debate over climate legislation, even as it makes a powerful, implicit case for a comprehensive climate program by reminding us of how high the costs of securing carbon-intensive forms of energy can be. But until the controversy over the accident subsides, or scientists and engineers come up better ways to deal with the next one, recent talk of peeling off many of the energy provisions from the comprehensive climate proposals almost certainly will subside. In the end, that's probably good news for climate advocates, since many of those provisions are sweeteners that could prove necessary to enact a serious climate program.