

# **Renewed State Interest in Gulf of Mexico Oil Drilling Concerns Bay County Chamber of Commerce and Bay Defense Alliance**

Panama City, FL – The Bay County Chamber of Commerce and the Bay Defense Alliance have serious concerns over renewed state interest in offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico due to the impact to Bay County military installations – Tyndall Air Force Base and the Naval Support Activity Panama City.

Renewed discussions of energy exploration in the Gulf of Mexico routinely include impacts to tourism and environment but often fail to consider the significant negative impact drilling will have on military installations and training in our area.

The Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City Division, Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center, and the Navy's Center for Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Diving (tenants of NSA PC) conduct research, development, test and evaluation for littoral, expeditionary, mine warfare, diving and salvage training, explosive ordnance disposal and special operations in the rich Gulf of Mexico training environment, which replicates the conditions of Persian Gulf waters.

Tyndall Air Force Base's 325<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing provides world class air superiority training for F-15 and F-22 pilots. With growth of the F-35 program at Eglin AFB, the test range will see increased utilization in the near future.

Missions at these installations are dependent upon unencumbered use of the Gulf Test Range east of the Military Mission Line. Limiting access to this valuable training asset would jeopardize missions at these installations.

The Bay County Chamber of Commerce and the Bay Defense Alliance are concerned that drilling will negatively impact and disrupt military installations in the Gulf of Mexico operations area.

Tyndall AFB and NSA PC contribute more than \$2.3 billion annually in economic impact to Bay County, according to a Haas Center study on Florida's Defense Industry Impact. Equally important is the valuable impact these installations have on our national defense.

A summary of this study can be accessed via the following link:

<http://www.floridadefense.org/documents/HAAS%202008/factbook2008.pdf>

Last year, the Bay County Chamber of Commerce and the Bay Defense Alliance, the Bay County Economic Development Alliance, Panama City Beach Chamber of Commerce and several other area municipalities drafted resolutions opposing any expansion or drilling east of the Military Mission Line.

“Communities all over the country are working hard to protect the missions and jobs associated with their installations as the military force structure continues to downsize. The Gulf Test Range is a national treasure that provides an important competitive edge for Florida’s bases. This is a significant advantage we cannot afford to lose in this ongoing effort to keep military jobs in Florida.” said Tom Neubauer, president of the Bay Defense Alliance.

“Nearly one third of Bay County’s economy is attributed to Tyndall Air Force Base and the Naval Support Activity Panama City. Moving forward on any initiative that would jeopardize the missions and the future of these installations is a top priority for the Chamber of Commerce,” said Carol Roberts, president of the Bay County Chamber of Commerce.

[www.baydefense.org](http://www.baydefense.org)

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