

# OUR VIEW: Gulf panel needs more experts

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President Obama's panel to investigate the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has one chief flaw: It has too few technical experts who can offer legitimate ideas to prevent a future spill and far too many environmental activists with anti-oil advocacy careers.

The administration needs to find more panel members with expertise on the technical aspects of oil and drilling if it wants its eventual findings to be taken seriously.

A panel stacked with anti-oil advocates will garner little respect, more so in the wake of Tuesday's ruling by a federal judge nixing an administration-planned ban on offshore drilling.

On the seven-member panel, which has yet to meet, there is only one engineer, Cherry A. Murray, the dean of Harvard University's engineering and applied sciences school. Her expertise is in optics and physics. Of the remaining panel members, five are policy and management experts with no technical experience. Some of the panel members are on the record as pushing bans on oil drilling.

They include former Florida governor and senator, Bob Graham, a Democrat, environmental activist, Frances Beinecke, and academic Donald Boesch, University of Maryland. As recently as June 3, Beinecke was blogging for an end to offshore drilling.

We have no problem with the topic of environmental activism being discussed within the panel, nor are we opposed to having that viewpoint represented. However, the Obama administration has stacked the deck with a large majority of ideologues who will provide oil and engineering policy recommendations for decades. More diversity of opinion is a must.

Jerry Taylor, policy expert with the libertarian Cato Institute, told the Associated Press that the panel is "an exercise in political theater where the findings are preordained by the people put on the commission." It's hard to disagree with that pessimistic assessment.

The administration should look to precedent for guidelines on selecting panels. For example, both federal panels that looked at the space shuttle disasters, Challenger and Columbia, had a majority of members with expertise in engineering and aviation.

The economies of several states, as well as our nation, will be impacted by our energy policy objectives over the next years and decades. It is imperative for the Obama administration to put the most-qualified experts on the Gulf oil spill panel.