

By: William Gibson

South Florida Congressman Allen West defended the oil industry and its tax breaks in a message to constituents on Monday, while accusing President Obama of demonizing Big Oil.

One of the dividing lines in this election year will separate those who stress oil production and those promoting renewable energy.

West and fellow Republicans generally defend Big Oil's tax breaks, calling them "cost-recovery mechanisms." Obama says the industry doesn't need incentives to expand production and make record profits.

The oil and gas industry supports 9.2 million American jobs and makes up 7.5 percent of our Gross Domestic Product," said West, R-Plantation, who favors expanded offshore drilling. The industry also pays \$86 million daily in rents, royalties, bonuses and income taxes, he said.

"President Obama wants to increase their taxes? Insidious, especially considering that the same day the president was demonizing our oil and gas industry, the Chinese government-owned Petroleum Company surpassed ExxonMobil in production."

Obama last week urged passage of a bill that would end tax breaks for big oil companies and give incentives instead for developing renewable energy, electric cars and energy-efficient homes.

"They (Congress) can either vote to spend billions of dollars more in oil subsidies that keep us trapped in the past," Obama said, "or they can vote to end these taxpayer subsidies that aren't needed to boost oil production so that we can invest in the future."

The Senate voted 51 to 47 to advance the bill, but backers needed 60 votes to overcome a filibuster. The issue, however, will live on in the election campaign.

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