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Kasich signs order against Lake Erie drilling

BLADE COLUMBUS BUREAU

COLUMBUS — Federal law prohibits drilling on Ohio’s side of Lake Erie, but Gov.

John Kasich today signed an executive order reasserting the state’s protection

of the lake if political winds should someday change federal policy.

“It is important for the continued environmental protection and economic

development of the Lake Erie region that the state bring certainty to the

question of whether the Director of Natural Resources will permit oil and gas

drilling from and under the bed of Lake Erie, if the current congressional ban

on drilling in or under the Great Lakes should be lifted,” the order reads.

It is substantially similar to an order that fellow Republican Gov. Bob Taft

signed in 2003 that expired when he left office in early 2007. Mr. Kasich had

committed himself to resurrecting such an order during his 2010 campaign even as

his administration has pursued expanded drilling for natural gas and oil

elsewhere in the state.

The order prohibits his Department of Natural Resources from issuing any permit,

license, or lease allowing for the withdrawal of oil and gas from the lake or

from under it.

Mr. Kasich was expected to sign the order during Fish Ohio activities in Port

Clinton.

“…(T)he citizens of Ohio depend upon Lake Erie as an irreplaceable source of

drinking water and for its cultural, environmental, recreational, and aesthetic

values,” Mr. Kasich’s order reads. “…(L)ake Erie provides tremendous economic

value to Ohio, not only through shipping, industry, and agriculture, but also

through lake-based recreation, travel, and tourism, generating significant

revenue annually from recreational boating and from fishing.

“…(T)he quality of life enjoyed by millions of people who live within reach of

these shores is closely linked to the quality of Lake Erie,” the order reads.

After Mr. Taft’s order expired, his Democratic successor, Gov. Ted Strickland,

proposed putting the ban in state law with his first budget, but the language

was removed. He then pledged to sign his own executive order to accomplish the

same thing if federal policy toward Lake Erie drilling changed. It did not,

despite the fact that drilling occurs on the Ontario side of the lake.

Ohio has since expanded drilling opportunities on public land like state parks

and recently enacted legislation to regulate the expanding practice of hydraulic

fracturing, which pumps chemically treated fluids at high pressure into shale to

fracture the stone and release the oil and natural gas trapped within.

Last year, another attempt was made to place a Lake Erie drilling ban into state

law, this time with the bill dealing with drilling in state parks and other

public land. The language was again removed.

Rep. Nicki Antonio (D., Lakewood) applauded the executive order but said a ban

written into state law is preferable.

“It is imperative that we protect Ohio’s largest source of freshwater for our

children and grandchildren, our economy, and our environment,” she said.