

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee adopted an amendment to an energy bill that would **allow drilling within 45 miles of Florida's Gulf Coast.**

Florida now bans oil and gas drilling within 125 miles of its coasts in the Gulf of Mexico with the aim of protecting its tourism from pollution and ruining views from its beaches.

The new language offered by Senator Byron Dorgan passed by a 13-10 vote and would also open the **Destin Dome area 24 miles south of Pensacola** to drilling.

The American Petroleum Institute estimates the Destin Dome area has at least 2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, enough to heat 2 million homes for 15 years.

The agency said the entire area in the eastern portion of the Gulf of Mexico that would be opened to drilling under this legislation could contain 3.7 billion barrels of oil and 21.5 tcf of natural gas.