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HELEN ROSE PATTERSON: Why can't MDA access pros and cons of drilling?

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Coast citizens opposing offshore drilling were finally given their day in court on Jan. 6. At the trial, the Mississippi Development Authority's lawyer claimed that the agency is not equipped to conduct an economic analysis of the costs and benefits of drilling. How is it possible that the state agency responsible for economic development can't assess the economic pros and cons of their actions? The attorney's claim might explain some of MDA's recent failures.

Over the past year, revelations about the Port of Gulfport have made front page news. MDA was allowed to use money intended for housing to expand the port and in return promised that 2,586 permanent jobs would be created by 2015. The port has not come close to meeting these goals.

At the end of 2013, we learned from a federal audit that Katrina recovery monies were spent on building new sewer systems for proposed developments based on overblown population growth estimates and faulty property appraisals. So instead of fixing the crumbling infrastructure of coastal communities, MDA allowed the money to be improperly spent on communities that do not yet exist.

With its continued push for drilling, MDA is repeating this pattern of actions first, questions later. Gov. Bryant needs to start ensuring that MDA and his other agencies are held to higher standards and serve the needs of the people. A hard look at the economic impacts of drilling would be a good place to start.

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