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## Don't Block Lakes Commission Choice

By The Detroit News

President George W. Bush has nominated a Michigan native and a former staffer for Gov. John Engler to the International Joint Commission, a Canadian-American authority in charge of waters between the nations. The nominee, Dennis Schornack, is experienced in water stewardship issues and is well qualified for the job.

But Michigan U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow is holding up his confirmation because, among other things, he opposes a ban on directional drilling in the Great Lakes. (This is the only kind of drilling that is still allowed in U.S. waters.)

Stabenow's opposition to both directional drilling and Schornack are inappropriate.

Presidential appointees should not be subjected to myriad litmus tests. And control of the Great Lakes should rest with the governors of the states they border, not with Congress.

Stabenow recently won an amendment to the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations bill that would impose a two-year moratorium on drilling until a federal study confirms that it is environmentally safe.

But those tests have already been conducted at the state level.

In directional drilling -- unlike platform drilling -- the wellhead is located several hundred feet away from the shoreline. The drill is angled to reach the oil or gas deposits buried below the lake. That minimizes the danger of water contamination from accidental spills, according to a scientific panel convened by Gov. John Engler in 1997 to examine the safety of directional wells.

Opponents of drilling have dismissed these findings as self-serving. But earlier this week, two University of Michigan scientists confirmed them. One of the scientists, Lynn Walter, a professor of geologic sciences, noted that "the technology for directional drilling has become highly sophisticated and much more environmentally friendly." Although Walters takes no position on a drilling ban, she said the Great Lakes contain oil reserves that could be potentially significant.

So enough scientific evidence exists to allow Michigan and the other Great Lakes states to proceed with directional drilling, should they choose to do so.

Schornack's support for directional drilling is not cause to deny his appointment. Stabenow insists that any federal representative to the commission must favor a ban on Great Lakes drilling if Canada is ever to be dissuaded to stop offshore drilling.

The demand oversteps her authority -- presidential appointees should reflect the president's philosophy, not the senator's -- and is irrelevant anyway.

The International Joint Commission's job is merely to enforce water quality regulations that Canada and America have agreed to in treaties. It has no power to enforce -- or write -- new regulations. Only the president has that power. Thus Schornack has no influence over Canada when it comes to drilling.

### The Issue

What are the right criteria for a nominee to the U.S.-Canada International Waters Commission?

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Stabenow has no business subjecting Schornack to a litmus test on drilling. Instead, she ought to consider the experience and qualifications that Schornack brings to the position and give him a fair hearing.

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