



[House, Senate call for new oil spill panel](#)

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By Darren Goode

The House Natural Resources Committee has joined a Senate panel in approving the creation of a bipartisan oil spill commission that would effectively compete against President Obama's.

The House panel agreed by voice vote Wednesday to set up a 10-member panel whose members would be appointed equally by the two parties. Obama would name the chairman, and congressional leaders would select the vice chairman and remaining eight members.

The House language — offered by Rep. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) — is identical to a plan from Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wy.) that the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved last month. Just five of 13 Democrats on the Senate panel voted for the Barrasso language, which was added as an amendment to a broader oil spill response strategy.

But the comfortable approval of the House panel language indicates Democrats overall may be supportive.

Republicans and some pro-drilling Democrats have argued the panel is necessary because the presidential commission is biased against offshore drilling and the oil-and-gas industry. They have especially targeted the inclusion of Natural Resources Defense Council President Frances Beinecke, a leading critic of offshore drilling.

Other Democrats have argued that the more information and investigation into the oil spill — and subsequent shoring up of drilling safety and oversight — the better.

Obama by executive order on May 21 established a commission co-chaired by former Florida Sen. Bob Graham (D) and William Reilly, a Republican who headed the Environmental Protection Agency under former President George H.W. Bush. Its official name is the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling.

The administration has suspended certain deepwater oil-and-gas drilling until the commission comes up with a set of safety and oversight recommendations.

Graham said this week at the panel's first meeting that its members would work without political bias or preconception.

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House Natural Resources Committee Republican Press Office
Contact: [Jill Strait](#) or [Spencer Pederson](#)
202-226-2311

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