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Opening Statement of
Representative Doc Hastings
Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
Wednesday, May 30, 2010
Legislative hearing on the
“Discussion Draft, Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 3534”

This hearing today should continue to focus on the crisis unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico. At this very moment: the well is not capped and oil is still leaking; oil is washing onto wetlands and beaches threatening the environment and wildlife; families are out of work; businesses are struggling to make ends meet; and Gulf States are still struggling to get the resources they need to respond to the spill.

Unfortunately, instead of addressing the immediate crisis at hand, there have been attempts to use this tragedy to impose a job-killing cap-and-trade national energy tax and push legislation that is unrelated to the spill response or reforms to offshore drilling.

Just yesterday, President Obama’s senior energy and environment advisor Carol Browner wrote an email message advocating that “the disaster in the Gulf” be used to “end our addiction to fossil fuels” and pass “comprehensive energy and climate legislation.”

The ongoing attempt by Democrats to exploit this crisis in order to push a national energy tax is clearly their best effort not to let a crisis go to waste. But it will not stop the leak and will not provide relief to the people struggling in the Gulf. It will, however, make the problem worse by increasing energy prices for all Americans and sending American jobs and companies overseas.

The bill we are discussing today was promoted as “addressing the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion.” However, most of its 200 pages have very little at all to do with this explosion and spill. And there are numerous provisions completely unrelated to offshore drilling safety and reform.

Reforms are clearly needed to make American offshore drilling the safest in the world, but Congress should not get ahead of the facts in a rush to write new laws.

If all of us were to ask ourselves if we believe we have all of the facts and information necessary to know exactly what changes need to be made in offshore drilling, the only honest answer is no.

There is so much we don't yet know.

There are bipartisan documents requests that have gone unanswered by the Administration regarding the government's oversight of this specific well. This includes the last inspection report on the blowout preventer.

Information has come to light about human errors that contributed to the explosion, but we still don't know why the emergency shutoff valves failed to work. The blowout preventer is still a mile beneath the ocean surface, and we likely won't have answers on what went wrong until it's retrieved and examined.

Numerous investigations are underway, including the Presidential Commission, which has yet to even hold its first meeting. Why spend taxpayer money on this Commission, if Congress has no intention of reviewing and considering its report and findings?

Congress must know what caused the disaster and then respond appropriately. This will ensure that Congress isn't just making reforms for headlines and political purposes, but making the right reforms to ensure American drilling is the safest in the world.

Finally, it is vital in these tough economic times that Congress knows what effect proposed new laws would have on American jobs, our economy and our dependence on foreign energy. As we've seen from the Administration's moratorium on deepwater drilling – impulsive decisions can have severe, long-term economic impacts. Solutions are supposed to help improve the situation in the Gulf, not make it worse. Congress must take extra care to ensure that any reforms will not cause greater economic damage than what is already being felt as a result of this spill.