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STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE BILL CASSIDY
AT THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON
“STATE PLANNING FOR OFFSHORE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT:
STANDARDS FOR PREPAREDNESS”
JUNE 24, 2010

Madam Chairwoman, I want to compliment you for scheduling this series of oversight hearings on the Deepwater Horizon incident. During the past two weeks, we will have heard from nearly 30 witnesses representing Federal, state, and local officials, university professors, conservation and environmental groups, fishermen, tourism experts, and seafood processors.

Despite all we have learned, the fact remains that the leak is not yet plugged, our coasts are not yet protected, and claims for damages are not being adequately processed and funded by BP. And there are still *many* unanswered questions.

We must get to the bottom of what happened and prevent it from ever happening again. We need to know the facts—a detailed account informed by understanding—so Congress and the Administration can put in place new safety and enforcement measures to make the United States the safest place in the world to drill for the energy resources that power our economy.

This fact-finding was supposed to be the purpose of a National Oil Spill Commission. Instead, the President created a Commission that is not up to the challenge. Instead of appointing independent experts with knowledge and expertise of deepwater drilling, he packed the Commission with people who lack expertise in the issues we’re confronting.

There are no petroleum engineers on this Commission, nor is there anyone with experience in deepwater drilling. My concern is that they do not have the members capable of understanding what is needed to be understood. If you’re going to have a commission figure out what went wrong in a petroleum engineering circumstance in deepwater drilling, you need petroleum engineers and deepwater drillers.

If we don’t learn from BP’s mistakes and our government’s failures, we won’t be able to implement reforms needed to prevent another spill, and our energy future will be far less secure.

This is not the first time that the President has rejected science and professional expertise in responding to the spill. He recently imposed a moratorium on deepwater drilling that was denounced by his own hand-picked advisers at the National Academy of Engineering. These experts stated that the moratorium, and I quote,—“will not measurably reduce risk further and it will have a lasting impact on the nation's economy which may be greater than that of the oil spill”—unquote.

As a physician and a medical school teacher, I tell my students “First, do no harm.” The President’s 6-month moratorium on deepwater exploration and production is doing great harm to our regional economy. The jobs and livelihoods of thousands of workers and their families are at risk every day this moratorium goes on. We must ensure the safety of our offshore energy production, but there is no scientific basis for this moratorium.

This Administration was touted as one in which science would trump politics. Just over a year ago, President Obama said quote—“Under my Administration, the days of science taking a back seat to ideology are over. . . To undermine scientific integrity is to undermine our democracy. . . I want to be sure that facts are driving scientific decisions, and not the other way around.”—unquote. In the case of the deepwater moratorium and the appointments to the Oil Spill Commission, the President has chosen politics over science.

Madam Chairwoman, at stake is our entire way of life along the Gulf Coast—our jobs, our energy production, our fisheries, our wetlands, and our dynamic Gulf ecosystem. And beyond the Gulf, at stake is the ability of our nation to produce affordable energy to heat our homes, fuel our vehicles, and power the businesses that provide jobs. In short, this is about America’s resources, the environment, and jobs.

More than 30 percent of this nation’s oil comes from the Gulf of Mexico, and 80 percent of that comes from deepwater wells. As a result of this moratorium, American job losses will range in tens or even hundreds of thousands, lost wages could be over \$330 million dollars per month, and the amount of oil and gas production from deepwater drilling in the Gulf will be reduced by 193,000 barrels in 2011.

And this is not just a six month moratorium. If these mobile rigs leave the Gulf, they will be gone for at least three to five years to other sites around the world.

Because of these economic costs and the fact that the moratorium will not increase safety, I introduced H. R. 5519, the Gulf Coast Jobs Preservation Act. The twin goals of this legislation are to terminate the moratorium and direct the Secretary of the Interior to identify additional measures to ensure the safety of deepwater drilling.

Madam Chair, our response to this disaster needs to be guided by facts—not emotion, not political opportunism, but truth. Let’s stay focused on the evidence and figure out what measures will ensure that the people, the economies, and the ecosystems of the Gulf can thrive.

Madam Chair, thank you for again holding these hearings.