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CONTACT: *Resources* - Jill Strait 202-226-2311
Cassidy – Wes Climer 202-*225 4256*

Cassidy Statement at Natural Resources Subcommittee Hearing on the Deepwater Horizon Spill

WASHINGTON D.C. – Congressman Bill Cassidy (LA-06) delivered the following opening statement as the acting Ranking Member at today's Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife hearing on "*Ocean science and data limits in a time of crisis: Do NOAA and the Fish and Wildlife Service have the resources to respond*?":

"Madam Chairwoman, I appreciate your scheduling this hearing on the resources and knowledge available to the federal government, especially NOAA and the Fish and Wildlife Service, in responding to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

It has been 57 days since the Deepwater Horizon exploded and sank some 42 miles off the coast of Louisiana. This spill is an ongoing disaster for the Gulf Coast region, its economy, its environment, and the millions of people who live there. And the spill is a tragedy cut in stone for those who lost loved ones.

As oil hits the coast, it is impacting the jobs dependent on the Gulf of Mexico. Additionally, the President's moratorium of deepwater drilling may destroy the livelihood of tens of thousands of Louisianians who rely on these well-paying jobs to support their families.

Many actions have been taken by BP and the Administration to try to reduce and stop the oil flowing from the wellhead, to breakup oil slicks, to remove oil from the water, to understand the trajectory of the spill, and to block oil's flow into sensitive coastal areas.

At previous hearings, I have referred to the National Academy of Science's report – *Oil in the Sea III.* This report was released in 2003 and it made many recommendations to federal agencies regarding natural and man-made releases of oil and the research necessary to understand the effects on the environment. However, there are many recommendations in this report and other reports, such as the 2004 Spill of National Significance Report, that have not been acted on by these agencies.

At last week's Subcommittee hearing, concerns were raised about the use of dispersants. While there seems to be some understanding of the impact of dispersants used on the water's surface, there are concerns with the short-and long-term impact of dispersant use within the water column. We also do not have much information on how oil degrades in sensitive marine areas. Some of our witnesses today will discuss this and tell us where the science is limited. It is apparent that we don't have the knowledge necessary to deal with a spill this size. It is also a disappointment that the Environmental Protection Agency, which was invited to this hearing and has issued the permits allowing the use of subsurface dispersant, apparently felt that this hearing is not worth their time.

At today's hearing, we will examine what information was available to the federal government prior to this oil spill. Did each agency have adequate baseline data available for the Gulf of Mexico region to understand the impacts of the oil? In an area where oil and gas exploration occurs daily, it would seem to be essential to have this information. But a lot of Federal efforts following the spill, particularly the responses of NOAA and the EPA, have been to *create* baseline data from scratch, rather than to act upon an existing set of knowledge and preparations.

Why have we not learned from previous spills, such as the 1979 Ixtoc drilling accident in the Gulf of Mexico? Why have we not learned any lessons from the Norwegian studies on what happens to oil released from deepwater areas? What about the methods used to respond to the Lake Barre oil spill affecting Louisiana marshes?

Why are outside researchers and even private citizens able to tell the Federal government things long before the government is able to come to the same conclusions? For instance, why were researchers able to tell from watching BP's spill-cam over the internet that more oil was being discharged from the Deepwater Horizon than was being estimated—and then the Federal government had to create a new committee before it could tell us that the outside researchers were right?

And why have we not tested dispersant use in deepwater when we knew that if there were ever a spill in the deepwater areas, we might need to use dispersants below the surface?

What information was available on sensitive coastal areas? Did the Administration react quickly enough to protect the coastal areas of concern? Do we know how coastal wetlands will respond and how long it will take them to recover from an oil spill this size?

How can we be more innovative in our approach to dealing with disasters such as this, and how can we reduce the federal red-tape that seems to hamstring our efforts at using new creative approaches? There are a great many outstanding scientists working at our universities, especially in communities affected by this spill, who should be consulted to understand the issues and find solutions to the challenges caused by this oil spill. Instead, I have heard from academic professionals in my home state of Louisiana that they are rarely offered the opportunity to engage the federal government and share their wide-ranging expertise, and that even after this spill they have had little opportunity to provide input. And I've been told that some researchers are being intimidated by BP to not publish their scientific findings, or else risk legal action. The federal government should be actively seeking the input of the academic community and ensuring that the data collected is published, so we can learn from this devastating event.

Madam Chairwoman, I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses, who will give us their unique prospective on the impacts of the oil spill disaster."

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