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Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings
Committee on Natural Resources
On Wednesday, April 13, 2011, at 10:00 a.m.
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Before the Full Committee Markup on
H.R. 1229, H.R. 1230 and H.R. 1231

I want to take a brief moment to remind everyone why we're here today marking up these bills.

We're here today – and we'll be here as long as it takes – to mark up these three bills because Congress must take action now to increase American energy production in the face of ever-rising gasoline prices.

The Washington Post has a story today with the headline "\$4-a-gallon gas fueling fears for recovery." High gasoline prices threaten jobs, families, small businesses, farmers, and our entire economy.

Unfortunately, during its two years in office, the Obama Administration has consistently moved to block access to our energy resources, block new job creation, and leave us more vulnerable to oil price spikes. Instead of relying on foreign countries for energy, we should instead look for the solution here at home. We should make it here in America.

That's why we're voting today on three offshore energy bills. To create new jobs, lower gas prices by tripling offshore American energy production, and help insulate our country from unstable foreign imports. This is the first step in a long process towards the goal of increasing all types of American energy production.

There are two things that no one on this Committee should forget: the economic threat posed by high gas prices and the tragic Deepwater Horizon spill nearly one year ago.

I believe that we all share the goal of wanting to ensure that U.S. offshore drilling is the safest in the world. As Chairman, the first hearing that I conducted was on the spill, and we've held 7 hearings on offshore energy and gasoline prices over the past 3 months. Next week, the Committee will travel to Louisiana for yet another hearing on the Gulf spill to hear firsthand about community recovery and new spill response technology. More will follow.

Let's be really clear about some facts.

Critics would have you believe that not one thing has changed since the day of the Deepwater Horizon spill. This is a complete distortion. One cannot deny the very real, significant and fundamental changes that have taken place over the past year to improve offshore drilling safety and response. Regulations governing offshore drilling have been enhanced and strengthened. Standards have been increased. New technologies have been developed, reviewed, tested and are currently deployed.

This is why the Administration has issued multiple permits for new drilling. The fact that the Director Bromwich, Secretary Salazar and the Obama Administration have approved the recent permits to drill very clearly demonstrates they believe offshore deepwater drilling can safely go forward. This is a clear declaration that the Obama Administration has confidence that drilling can and will be conducted safely. They deserve credit for these actions and these bills encourage them to move forward in a timely manner.

It's very telling to note that those who oppose these bills with inaccurate claims that safety is being ignored are not clamoring to block, stop or reverse the ten new drilling permits that the Obama Administration has issued for new drilling in the Gulf. These charges are lobbed against Republican proposals, but not the actions of the Democrat President.

Does this mean that more can't be done? Of course not. As more information is learned, appropriate action can, should and will be taken by Congress, the Department and industry.

For example, House Republicans have acted to increase funding for BOEM in the FY 2011 CR to increase oversight. While Democrats failed to act on this on their watch, Republicans are making it happen.

And HR 1229 writes two reforms into the law, including a requirement in the law for the Secretary to conduct a "safety review" before approving a permit to drill.

As Chairman, I have repeatedly explained that the Committee will be acting on many positive actions to encourage the safe, responsible development of all forms of energy. Let there be no doubt that with gasoline prices climbing towards \$4 per gallon, this Committee will not sit idly by while America has the tremendous potential to produce more energy here, create jobs, and lower prices."