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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of
Representative Doc Hastings
Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
Wednesday, May 26, 2010
Oversight hearing on the
“Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Strategy and
Implications of the Deepwater Horizon Rig Explosion”

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Stopping the leaking well, cleaning up the oil, and responding to the needs of affected Gulf Coast communities should be the top priorities for everyone - whether it's BP, the Department of Interior, the White House, or Members of Congress.

It's been over a month since oil started leaking into the Gulf of Mexico. Each day that oil continues to spill is a day that frustration swells higher. Both B.P. and the Obama Administration have a joint and shared duty to do everything within their power to stop the flow of oil.

While the main focus must be on addressing the immediate crisis, tough questions must be asked and those responsible held accountable. The time for full disclosure and honest answers cannot be avoided.

This is the first of at least seven hearings by this Committee. Hearings are an important part of conducting thorough oversight and investigation. Just as critical is the Obama Administration disclosing reports and documents to the public and to Congress for review and scrutiny. A true investigation requires examination of both the causes and responses to the spill.

Were there failures in government oversight and inspections before the explosion?

What was done improperly in the drilling operation?

What was the immediate emergency response of the drilling operators and the government?

Was everything that could be done, done immediately and without delay?

What are the economic impacts on communities, businesses and fishermen?

What are the impacts on wildlife and the environment?

We must get to the bottom of all of these questions. We must know what happened so that informed, educated decisions can be made and actions taken.

Those in Washington, D.C. must resist the rush to judgments and the stampede to get in front of the television cameras.

We've got an important job to do: get answers, and then fix the failures to prevent another spill and ensure American-made energy continues to operate and is the safest in the world.

For example, credit is due to Secretary Salazar for his statements on the need to understand the economic impacts before acting to lift the liability caps. The bipartisan demand that BP fully pay for the spill is clear, just as there is bipartisan support for reviewing an increase in the cap. Care must be taken, though, to do it right so that American energy production isn't shutdown and tens of thousands of American jobs aren't lost.

As tough questions are asked, the actions of both the Obama and Bush Administrations must be squarely under the spotlight. Regardless of which party occupied the White House or controlled the Department of Interior, it's vital that we know where failures occurred so that the necessary reforms can be instituted.

This isn't the time for anyone to cover their backsides. It's the time to get all the facts out in the open so changes can be made to prevent such a terrible event from ever happening again.

On the matter of MMS, the agency's fundamental failures are well known and have been for several years.

Republicans on the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, led by Darrell Issa, have conducted multiple investigations into MMS.

Key questions that need to be answered are: what did the Department do with this information, what was done to correct these failings, and when was that action taken?

The Inspector General reports issued yesterday raise even more questions about the lack of adequate response to known problems.

Back in the summer of 2008, gas prices climbed past four dollars per gallon. The response from the public was clear: produce more energy in America. A majority of Americans understand the importance of continued offshore drilling to our economy, to American jobs, and to our national security.

This unprecedented spill must be met with real reform and stronger safety measures to better protect our environment and coastal communities, but also to ensure we continue to produce oil here in the U.S.

Turning back on offshore energy production would be too costly in lost jobs, higher gas prices, and increased dependence on foreign sources from hostile, unstable nations. America needs an all-of-the-above energy plan that includes renewables such as wind and solar, new nuclear power, clean hydropower, and a continued commitment to drilling oil and natural gas.

I look forward to today's testimony and the opportunity to ask questions of the witnesses.