

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

The President's Weekly Address

May 22, 2010

One month ago this week, BP's Deepwater Horizon drilling rig exploded off Louisiana's coast, killing 11 people and rupturing an underwater pipe. The resulting oil spill has not only dealt an economic blow to Americans across the Gulf Coast, it also represents an environmental disaster.

In response, we're drawing on America's best minds and using the world's best technology to stop the leak. We've deployed over 1,100 vessels, about 24,000 personnel, and more than 2 million total feet of boom to help contain it. And we're doing all we can to assist struggling fishermen and the small businesses and communities that depend on them.

Folks on the Gulf Coast and across America are rightly demanding swift action to clean up BP's mess and end this ordeal. But they're also demanding to know how this happened in the first place and how we can make sure it never happens again. That's what I'd like to spend a few minutes talking with you about.

First and foremost, what led to this disaster was a breakdown of responsibility on the part of BP and perhaps others, including Transocean and Halliburton. And we'll continue to hold the relevant companies accountable not only for being forthcoming and transparent about the facts surrounding the leak but for shutting it down, repairing the damage it does, and repaying Americans who've suffered a financial loss.

But even as we continue to hold BP accountable, we also need to hold Washington accountable. Now, this catastrophe is unprecedented in its nature, and it presents a host of new challenges we're working to address. But the question is what lessons we can learn from this disaster to make sure it never happens again.

If the laws on our books are inadequate to prevent such an oil spill or if we didn't enforce those laws, I want to know it. I want to know what worked and what didn't work in our response to the disaster and where oversight of the oil and gas industry broke down. We know, for example, that a cozy relationship between oil and gas companies and the agencies that regulate them has long been a source of concern.

Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar has taken steps to address this problem, steps that build on reforms he's been implementing since he took office. But we need to do a lot more to protect the health and safety of our people, to safeguard the quality of our air and water, and to preserve the natural beauty and bounty of America.

In recent weeks, we've taken a number of immediate measures to prevent another spill. We've ordered inspections of all deepwater operations in the Gulf of Mexico. We've announced that no permits for drilling new wells will go forward until the 30-day safety and environmental review I requested is complete. And I've called on Congress to pass a bill that would provide critical funds and tools to respond to this spill and better prepare us to confront any future spills.

But we also need to take a comprehensive look at how the oil and gas industry operates and how we regulate them. That's why on Friday, I signed an Executive order establishing the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling. While

there are a number of ongoing investigations, including an independent review by the National Academy of Engineering, the purpose of this Commission is to consider both the root causes of the disaster and offer options on what safety and environmental precautions we need to take to prevent a similar disaster from happening again. This Commission, I'd note, is similar to one proposed by Congresswoman Capps and Senator Whitehouse.

And I've asked Democrat Bob Graham and Republican Bill Reilly to cochair this Commission. Bob served two terms as Florida's Governor and represented Florida as a United States Senator for almost two decades. During that time, he earned a reputation as a champion of the environment, leading the most extensive environmental protection effort in the State's history.

Bill Reilly is chairman emeritus of the board of the World Wildlife Fund, and he also is deeply knowledgeable about the oil and gas industry. During the Presidency of George H.W. Bush, Bill was Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and his tenure encompassed the Exxon *Valdez* disaster.

I can't think of two people who will bring greater experience or better judgment to the task at hand. In the days to come, I'll appoint five other distinguished Americans, including scientists, engineers, and environmental advocates, to join them on the Commission. And I'm directing them to report back in 6 months with recommendations on how we can prevent and mitigate the impact of any future spills that result from offshore drilling.

One of the reasons I ran for President was to put America on the path to energy independence, and I've not wavered from that commitment. To achieve that goal, we must pursue clean energy and energy efficiency, and we've taken significant steps to do so. And we must also pursue domestic sources of oil and gas. Because it represents 30 percent of our oil production, the Gulf of Mexico can play an important part in securing our energy future. But we can only pursue offshore oil drilling if we have assurances that a disaster like the BP oil spill will not happen again. This Commission will, I hope, help provide those assurances so we can continue to seek a secure energy future for the United States of America.

Thanks so much.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 3:05 p.m. on May 21 in the Blue Room at the White House for broadcast on May 22. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 21 but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on May 22. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

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