

CBS News Sunday Morning

National Programming

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Text from Video:

president obama travels to louisiana today to see the gulf spill firsthand. watching the unfolding disaster for us this morning are mark strassmann and michelle miller along with... along the threatened coast line and wyatt andrews. we begin with mark strassmann along the gulf coast. >> reporter: the spill has gone from bad to worse. what gannon began as a human tragedy an oil rig explosion on april 20 that killed 11 workers has morphed into an environmental calamity. a mild underwater, a leaking well bleeds an estimated 200,000 gallons of oil every day into the gulf of mexico. a growing blob of oil, now the size of jamaica, menaces five coastal states. louisiana governor bobby jindal. >> this isn't just about our way of life. >> reporter: louisiana's coast is the way of life. this fishing boat captain took us to the point where louisiana's marsh ends and the gulf begins. ground zero for the approaching spill. >> once it comes in contact, the fishery is dead, the tourism, the shrimping, the crabbing, everything is wiped out. it's doomsday. >> reporter: if that sounds like panic, there's a panicky feel to this emergency response. no one has a fix for the leaking well. the obama white house is fighting with bp, the oil giant that leased the sunken rig and is responsible for making the emergency response. interior secretary ken salazar put it bluntly. >> i pressed the ceos of bp as well as the engineers to work harder and faster and smarter to get the job done. >> reporter: a river of oil now coarses to the gulf surface. various estimates say between two million gallons and nine million gallons have leaked so far with no end in sight. over the next 72 hours land fall could come in louisiana, mississippi or alabama. >> they haven't stopped the oil leak yet. it hasn't been bad enough if the oil leak had been stopped and the oil floating around. i wouldn't feel near as bad. knowing it's dumping 5,000-plus barrels a day, it's got to go somewhere. >> reporter: that somewhere could be louisiana's coast. home to some of the world's premiere fishing areas. and 400 species of wildlife. eventually this spill could approach even dwarf the exxon val degrees, the most notorious oil disaster in u.s. history. 11 million gallons dumped into alaska's prince william sound. but after hurricane katrina, louisiana's coast line and psyche are both more fragile and complicated. historian douglas brinkley. >> the oil industry is constantly given free reign in louisiana. it's been treated as a kind of third world society out there in the gulf of mexico. it's almost laughed at by oil executives. you can do what you want in the gulf. >> reporter: this is wyatt andrews in washington. drilling in the gulf of mexico had been disaster free for decades. drilling here had a safety record so convincing.. >> drill, baby, drill. >> reporter: drill, baby, drill was supported by the facts and most of the public and so in march.. >> the expansion of off shore oil and gas exploration. >> reporter: the president opened up new drilling areas for north alaska, the eastern gulf of mexico and most of the mid atlantic. on friday, he said those new leases can still move forward but that any new well must have the latest in safety technology. >> we're going to make sure that any leases going forward have those safeguards. >> reporter: but that is not enough for drilling opponents. senator bill nelson of florida wants all new drilling work stopped until the cause of the accident is known. >> and he drew a line in the eastern gulf, nothing closer to florida, he said, than 125 miles. >> it's dead on arrival on any kind of additional closeness to the coast of florida. >> reporter: there is also a concern that the industry's safety record did not extend to bp. the horrendous texas city refinery explosion that killed 15 people in 2005 was bp. the pipeline leak in alaska in 2006 was bp's. and when both accidents were connected to corporate cost-cutting, the head of bp america, robert malone, promised better. >> we have fallen short of what we expect of ourselves. >> reporter: this accident is different because bp was leasing, not operating, the rig. but bp was in charge of the clean-up and was responsible for the claims the oil leak was small, only 1,000 barrels a day. >> is that suspicious that an oil company would try to minimize their concern about how much oil is being spilled? >> reporter: the president

traveled today to the disaster zone to see the extent of the oil spill and to check on the government's response. the white house is rebuffing all suggestions that the administration waited too long to respond saying both the coast guard and the president personally were fully engaged from the beginning. >> reporter: this is michelle miller in venice, louisiana. for fishermen like kip, the spill could not have come at a worse time. this is your one shot at work, this season. >> that's absolutely correct. other than this, we have no work. >> reporter: since the spill, the fishing industry has been but shut down here. about one quarter of the fish harvested in the continue netal united states come from gulf coast waters. billy is the parish president. >> we should have started planning the clean-up while we were still watching that rig burn. >> reporter: after days of watching coast guard and bp ships try and fail to contain the spill, fishermen are frustrated. wayland is a shrimper. >> they bring in a lot of outside people. that's ever even been here before and don't know the waters as well as we do. >> reporter: the fishermen are hoping to get hired and paid by bp. they received some traing in how to clean up oil spills. now they're waiting. they haven't called you? >> no. >> reporter: you haven't heard from them? >> no. >> reporter: out of more than 100 shrimp boats in this venice marina, virb fishermen here say only one has been hired for the clean-up. attempts to contain the spill are continuing using those bright orange booms but high winds and waves have washed many of the booms ashore already. the oil is a thin sheen about the thickness of a couple of nickels in some spots. the goal is to skim it off by laying out more booms in a triangular formation. so far about a million gallons have been skimmed off. aircraft are playing a role too. spraying a chemical used to break up the oil. but the slick is still growing. there is little reason to be hopeful. >> i think it's going to be devastating. >> reporter: fisherman anthony. >> it is probably going to kill all the marsh grasses and stuff. no telling how many little animals. the animals are going to really suffer pretty bad. >> people are worried about pelicans. what about the children? what about the wives? what about the people, you know? pelicans are nice. but what about people?