

Congressman John Garamendi Testimony before the Committee on Natural Resources Hearing: "Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Strategy and Implications of the Deepwater Horizon Rig Explosion" May 27, 2010

Chairman Rahall, Ranking Member Hastings, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me the honor of testifying before this esteemed committee. We're here today to talk about the past, present, and future of offshore oil drilling.

For almost two decades I have helped shape policy on offshore oil drilling at both the state and federal level. During the Clinton Administration, I served as Deputy Secretary at the Department of Interior where I advised President Clinton to extend the presidential moratorium, a move I'm proud to say he ultimately made. As the Lieutenant Governor of California, I testified before Secretary Salazar on the dangers of the Administration allowing offshore oil drilling off the coast of California. I stood up to Governor Schwarzenegger as head of the State Lands Commission, the independent state agency in charge of granting oil leases, and cast the deciding vote against his proposal to expand new drilling leases at the PXP platform off the coast of Santa Barbara. Now in Congress, I am proud to work with my colleagues to ensure

that offshore oil drilling is a practice relegated to the pages of history textbooks.

My home state of California is all too familiar with the dire consequences of offshore oil drilling. In fact, the 1969 Santa Barbara spill, from its causes to outcome, foreshadows the events now taking place in the Gulf of Mexico.

On the afternoon of January 29, 1969, a Union Oil Co. (now Unocal) platform stationed six miles off the coast of Summerland, CA suffered a blowout. Workers had drilled a well 3,500 feet below the ocean floor and were in the process of retrieving the pipe in order to replace a drill bit when the "mud" used to maintain pressure became dangerously low. As the pressure built up and started to strain the casing on the upper part of the well, an emergency attempt was made to cap it, but this action only succeeded in further increasing the pressure inside the well. Under this extreme pressure a burst of natural gas blew out all of the drilling mud, created five breaks in an east-west fault on the ocean floor, releasing oil and gas from deep beneath the earth.

Union Oil had been granted a waiver by the United States Geological Survey that allowed them to use a shorter casing on the pipe than federal standards prescribed (a casing is a reinforcing element of the well that is supposed to prevent blowouts). Even though the well itself was capped, the fragmentation of the wellhead produced a disaster. Oil and natural gas broiled to the ocean surface in the vicinity of the oil platform for eleven days while increasingly desperate attempts were made to contain and stop the spill. On the eleventh day, chemical mud was successfully used to seal the cracks in the seafloor, but only after approximately three million gallons of oil escaped. The wind, ocean currents, tides and waves dispersed the spilled oil into the biologically diverse waters of the Santa Barbara channel and coated the pristine California beaches with oil and sludge from Rincon Point to Goleta, marring 35 miles of coastline and killing thousands of aquatic species.

The aftermath of this spill and the resulting public outcry led to the Santa Barbara County establishing the first Earth Day and is often cited as a key moment in the modern environmental movement. In 1969, as in 2010, the

technology of the day failed to prevent or address the spill and for eleven days, oil workers struggled to cap the rupture.

Tragically, we have not learned the lessons of Santa Barbara and other similar events that have occurred in years since. This time, 11 workers lost their lives and scores of others were injured. The spill in the Gulf shows that our reach has exceeded our grasp, our ability to extract has exceeded our ability to anticipate and prevent disaster. Although we can dig wells miles below the ocean bottom, we still lack the means to avoid or combat oil spills of the magnitude or at the depth of the Deepwater Horizon well. As in 1969, this is not the oil industry or even BP's first accident.

According to the Minerals Management Service (MMS), there were 38 blowouts in the Gulf of Mexico between 1992 and 2006. BP's own safety record in recent years paints a portrait of a corporation that seemingly places profit over safety or environmental concerns. After a Texas City, Texas refinery blew up in 2005, killing 15 workers, the company vowed to address the safety shortfalls that caused the blast. Then in 2006 an accident spilled 200,000 gallons of oil over the North Slope of Alaska. After agreeing to pay \$370 million in fines and settling criminal charges, resulting from the Texas

City blast, BP once again pledged to clean up its act. Now in 2010 we are faced with yet another environmental crisis, this time resulting from the Deepwater Horizon spill. The spill is potentially unprecedented in its destructive scope and BP is unable to cap the well or clean up the spill. Given recent significant lapses by BP, perhaps its corporate motto should be “Bleeding Petroleum” rather than “Beyond Petroleum.”

Gulf Coast communities, like the Santa Barbara area in 1969, are learning the hard lessons that come in the wake of a catastrophic oil spill. Already \$350 million dollars has been spent to clean up the spill and experts estimate billions more will be spent before the cleanup is complete. The true final cost to the Gulf Coast communities of having their way of life shattered by BP’s negligence remains unquantifiable.

One-third of the fish consumed in the U.S. comes from the Gulf Coast and market prices are already beginning to rise based on fears that supply will soon be greatly outpaced by demand. Even our best scientists cannot determine how long it will be before the numerous fragile ecosystems in the Gulf truly recover from the poisons now seeping through wetlands and estuaries along the Gulf of Mexico. Add to that the unknown effects of the

highly toxic dispersants sprayed liberally by BP to “disperse” the spill, and we are long away from waking up from the nightmare that is the Deepwater Horizon spill.

That’s why Congress must act now to reinstate the ban on offshore oil drilling of the West Coast. For more than 20 years, from 1988 to 2008, through both Republican and Democratic control of Congress and the White House, a moratorium was in place that protected those federal waters from offshore oil drilling. Before “Drill Baby Drill” was all the rage at the Republican National Convention, President George H.W. Bush, himself a Texas oil man, established an executive moratorium on new OCS oil and gas leasing and drilling [where?] until 2002, which President Clinton extended until 2012. Until 2008, when President George W. Bush lifted the executive moratorium, there was consensus among the both parties during their time in the White House that our precious oceanic and coastal resources had to be protected from the scourge of offshore oil drilling. Even though President Obama has wisely reinstated a temporary moratorium on offshore oil drilling, Congressional action is needed to codify the will of the people’s representatives.

That is why I introduced H.R. 5213, the West Coast Ocean Protection Act of 2010, which will protect the U.S. mainland, from the Canadian to Mexican border, from new offshore oil drilling. A few weeks after my bill was introduced, six Senators, representing California, Oregon and Washington introduced companion legislation in the Senate. So far 35 of my colleagues from the House, representing 6 six states and a territory; Arizona, California, Maryland, New Jersey, Northern Marianas Islands, Oregon and Washington have agreed to join the bill as cosponsors.

Our nation ultimately faces a decision. Climate change and global economic competition require us to green our economy. Clean, renewable sources of energy are our inevitable future, and the longer we drag our feet in setting up our country as the base for the research, manufacturing, installation, and maintenance of new and better green technologies, we allow our economy to drift further away from our competitors. We can drill and spill our economy into decline, or we can invest in the wind, solar, and other renewable energy sources that will determine the victors of 21st century economic development.

Chairman Rahall and Ranking Member Hastings, thank you again for allowing me to testify on this important national issue. I look forward to working with you in the future.