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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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June 29, 2010

The Honorable Edolphus Towns
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chairman Towns:

The Oversight and Government Reform Committee is currently conducting an investigation into the mismanagement and bureaucratic failures at the Interior Department's Minerals and Management Service, which we know contributed significantly to the events leading up to the explosion on the Deepwater Horizon.¹ In light of new concerns brought to the attention of Committee staff during a recent visit to the Gulf area, we respectfully request the Committee broaden the scope of our inquiry. A critical issue that appears to be inadequately addressed is how the federal government plans to handle the unique challenges this disaster faced with the backdrop of the 2010 hurricane season.

The formation of Tropical Storm Alex off the coast of Cuba should focus our attention on how hurricanes could severely complicate efforts to fight the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. This weather system is just one of many that could inflict chaos on the Gulf States in what is predicted to be a very active hurricane season. Experts are predicting between 15 and 16 named storms, 6 to 8 hurricanes and 3 to 5 major hurricanes.² Some experts have warned that meteorological conditions mirror 2005, the year of Hurricane Katrina.³

During our visit to New Orleans, staff members from both the Majority and Minority heard first hand the concerns of local officials over whether the Administration is prepared to respond to the unique challenges of the 2010 hurricane season. An official

¹ Letter from the Honorable Darrell Issa, Ranking Member to the Honorable Edolphus Towns, Chairman, House Oversight and Government Reform Committee (May 5, 2010).

² Active 2010 Atlantic Hurricane Season Likely, Gulf Coast Vulnerable, ENV. NEWS SERVICE, April 1, 2010.

³ Kyla Calvert, Scientists Predict 2010 Hurricane season will rival history's worst, The Island Packet, June 2, 2010.

from St. Bernard Parish spoke of the unimaginable destruction and chaos that could be inflicted on the region, as fierce winds and high tides threaten to fling oil across Gulf Coast communities.⁴ You will recall that St. Bernard Parish was flooded in the wake of Katrina, with only 5 of its 27,000 homes untouched by Katrina's flood waters.

Local officials are worried that a tropical event will complicate clean up efforts while oil is still in the Gulf. In addition to environmental damage, these leaders foresee a bureaucratic showdown between BP and the federal government over who is responsible for clean up and removal of oil soaked debris.⁵ According to the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), "the high winds may distribute oil over a wider area."⁶ In a phone interview on June 24, 2010, Plaquemines Parish President Billy Nungesser stated unequivocally that Administration officials had neither spoken with him, nor sought his opinion on how responsibilities would be allocated between the federal government and BP in the event that oil is brought onshore by a tropical event.⁷

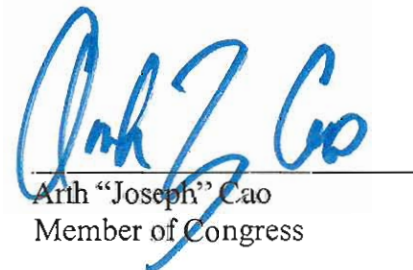
As this Committee is charged with overseeing the effectiveness and adequacy of federal operations, it is our obligation to ensure the federal response to the worst environmental disaster in our history is adequate and comprehensive. The Administration has a narrow window of opportunity to be proactive in its response and immediate leadership in this area is critical.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that the federal government is doing all it can to respond to the disaster in the Gulf. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at any time. Should your staff require additional information, they may reach Kristina Moore or Thomas Alexander at (202) 225-5074.

Sincerely,



Darrell Issa
Ranking Member



Arth "Joseph" Cao
Member of Congress

⁴ Interview with Charlotte Randolph, President, Lafourche Parish, in Thibodaux, LA (June 15, 2010); Interview with David Dysart, Director of Homeland Security, St. Bernard Parish, Chalmette, LA (June 16, 2010).

⁵ Interview with David Dysart, Director of Homeland Security, St. Bernard Parish, Chalmette, LA (June 16, 2010).

⁶ Jeremy A. Kaplan, *First Hurricane of Season May Be Growing in Gulf*, FOXNEWS.COM, June 25, 2010, available at <http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2010/06/25/hurricane-season-building-gulf/>.

⁷ Phone interview with Billy Nungesser, Plaquemines Parish President, (June 24, 2010).