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ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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MEMORANDUM

May 10, 2010

To: Members of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Fr: Committee on Energy and Commerce Staff

Re: Hearing on "Inquiry into the Deepwater Horizon Gulf Coast Oil Spill"

On Wednesday, May 12, 2010, at 10:00 a.m. in room 2123 of the Rayburn House Office Building, the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will hold a hearing entitled, "Inquiry into the Deepwater Horizon Gulf Coast Oil Spill." This hearing will examine what caused the explosion at the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig and the oil spill that is now spreading across the Gulf of Mexico.

I. BACKGROUND

On April 20, 2010, at about 10 p.m., an explosion occurred on the Deepwater Horizon deep-water oil drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico. 126 people were on board at the time. Fifteen of those were injured and eleven people went missing. The Deepwater Horizon, owned by Transocean Ltd., was under a contract with BP to drill an exploratory well. BP was the lessee of the area in which the rig was operating. At the time of the explosion, BP and Transocean were in the process of closing the well in anticipation of later production. Halliburton had recently completed cementing of casings in the well. The Coast Guard responded to the explosion and fire.

The next day, on April 21, 2010, the Coast Guard continued its search for the missing eleven people. Pursuant to the National Contingency Plan, the Administration named Rear Admiral Mary Landry the Federal On-Scene Coordinator. A Regional Response Team was established, including representatives of the Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Commerce (DOC)/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of the Interior (DOI)and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as well as state and local representatives. The Regional Response Team began developing plans, providing technical advice and access to resources and equipment from its member agencies, and overseeing BP's response.

A second explosion on April 22, 2010, caused the Deepwater Horizon to sink into the Gulf of Mexico at 10:22 a.m. The Coast Guard continued its search for the missing people. Air and sea restriction zones were established around the sink site for safety purposes. The Coast Guard conducted overflights and multiple dives with remote operated marine vehicles, but found no apparent leak. Nevertheless, officials readied 100,000 gallons of dispersants between Stennis, Miss., Houma and Lake Charles, La. This dispersant is pre-approved for use by EPA Regions VI and IV Regional Response Teams.

A National Response Team (NRT), an organization of 16 federal departments and agencies responsible for coordinating emergency preparedness and response to oil and hazardous substance pollution events, convened its first daily meeting with leadership from across the federal government. Participants in the meeting included the White House, U.S. Coast Guard, the Department of Defense, DHS, DOC, DOI and EPA, among others.

On April 23, 2010, the Unified Area Command was formally stood up in Robert, La., after three days of informal operations and planning. The U.S. Coast Guard announced that the Deepwater Horizon rig had been found upside down approximately 1,500 feet northwest of the blowout preventer at the wellhead. At 5 p.m., the Coast Guard suspended the search for the 11 missing workers after searching continuously for three days with 28 air and surface rescue trips, covering approximately 5,375 square miles.

On April 24, 2010, Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) inspected the capsized rig on the sea floor and found two places where oil was leaking from the well pipe. Officials estimated that up to 1,000 barrels of oil a day could be leaking into the water approximately 5,000 feet below the surface. At that time, on-water response efforts were hampered by thunderstorms, rain and rough seas in the area.

On April 25, 2010**,** Unified Command approved a plan to use submersible ROVs in an effort to activate the blowout preventer (BOP) on the sea floor at the well head and stop the flow of oil. The BOP was manufactured by Cameron International. In addition, DOI's Minerals Management Service (MMS) worked with BP on an exploration plan to drill two relief wells to intercept the leaking well, which could then be cemented closed. MMS is responsible for leases on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) of the United States. At this point, poor weather continues to hamper oil recovery and clean-up operations. Officials ready boom (barriers) for use containing the oil.

On April 26, 2010**,** BP filed permits with MMS for an engineering review and approval for drilling the relief wells. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began working with the Coast Guard and other partners to identify high-priority natural resources (national wildlife refuges) for booming operations along potentially affected Gulf Coast areas. At this point, Unified Command has activated more than 1,000 personnel, ten offshore response vessels, and seven skimming boats. Crews have applied 14,654 gallons of dispersant and positioned 21,340 feet of containment boom at the spill site.

On April 27, 2010**,** Secretary of Homeland Security Napolitano and Secretary of the Interior Salazar signed an order establishing the next steps for a joint investigation that is

currently underway into the causes of the explosion. The joint investigation will have the power to issue subpoenas, hold public hearings, call witnesses, and take other steps that may be needed to determine the cause of the incident.

On April 28, 2010**,** crews began a controlled burn of oil for 30 minutes. This method is used to limit the amount of oil that could wash ashore. Although successful, this method can only be used when the weather conditions are mild. EPA established air monitoring stations along Plaquemines Parish on the Louisiana coast to determine how the oil spill and controlled burns could affect air quality. EPA also deployed two Trace Atmospheric Gas Analyzers – mobile laboratories that collect and analyze air quality samples in real time – to monitor air quality in the region. That same day, the Coast Guard announced that five times more oil (210,000 gallons) is leaking in the Gulf of Mexico than originally thought. A new leak was discovered, bringing the total to three. Seven sperm whales were seen near the slick, but were not observed to be harmed. Meanwhile, MMS approved the drilling permit for the first relief well.

On April 29, 2010**,** Secretary Napolitano declared the incident to be a Spill of National Significance, enabling the appointment of a National Incident Commander to coordinate response resources at the national level. At this point, crews have applied 98,360 gallons of dispersant. Approximately 75 vessels are conducting containment and cleanup operations in the area. Crews have recovered 763,000 gallons of oily water and positioned 174,000 feet of boom.

On April 30, 2010, the Secretary of Defense mobilized the Louisiana National Guard to help in the ongoing efforts to assist local communities in the cleanup and removal of oil and to protect critical habitats from contamination. EPA began monitoring water quality in the Gulf Coast region. One oiled bird was recovered and brought to the wildlife rehab center. Response crews began testing a new technique to break up the oil before it reaches the surface—a remotely operated underwater vehicle dispensing sub-surface dispersant at a rate of nine gallons per minute. At this point, 2,000 personnel are responding. Crews have applied 139,450 gallons of dispersant, recovered 853,000 gallons of oily water, and positioned 217,000 feet of boom. Approximately 75 vessels are conducting containment and cleanup operations in the area.

On May 1, 2010**,** Department of Homeland Security Secretary Napolitano named U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Thad Allen the National Incident Commander for the Administration's continued, coordinated response. Response crews worked through the night using a ROV to dispense 3,000 gallons of sub-surface dispersant. The Department of Defense airlifted additional boom materials to Mobile to prepare for the possible spreading of the oil slick across the Gulf Coast. At this point, nearly 2,000 personnel are responding to the spill. Approximately 75 response vessels are on-site, including skimmers, tugs, barges, and recovery vessels to assist in containment and cleanup efforts—in addition to dozens of aircraft, remotely operated vehicles, and multiple mobile offshore drilling units. Crews have deployed more than 275,000 feet of boom to contain the spill—an increase of nearly 60,000 feet since April 30th Crews have recovered more than 1 million gallons of an oil-water mix and applied nearly 143,000 gallons of dispersant.

On May 2, 2010, BP began drilling the first deep-water intercept relief well, which is located one-half mile from the Macondo well, in a water depth of roughly 4,990 feet. This relief well will attempt to intercept the existing wellbore at approximately 16,000 feet below the sea floor. BP estimates this process will take at least 90 days. Once that is accomplished, heavy fluids and cement can be pumped downhole to kill the well. Meanwhile, NOAA restricted fishing for a minimum of ten days in federal waters most affected by the BP oil spill, largely between Louisiana state waters at the mouth of the Mississippi River to waters off Florida's Pensacola Bay. The response crews continued to test a new technique to break up the oil before it reaches the surface. BP and NOAA continued to evaluate the results of the test procedure to determine its feasibility for continued use.

On May 3, 2010, volunteer recruitment efforts continued, including outreach to local fishermen with boats, which can be used as vessels of opportunity to assist contractors in deploying boom. More than 2,000 volunteers have received training to assist in the response effort to date. Nearly 3,000 personnel are responding to the spill, and approximately 200 response vessels are on-site. Crews have recovered more than 1 million gallons of an oil-water mix and applied nearly 156,000 gallons of dispersant. Nine staging areas have been set up to protect vital shoreline in all potentially affected Gulf Coast states.

On May 4, 2010, the Pentagon approved the federal mobilization of up to 17,500 National Guard troops to help various states with the oil spill (up to 6,000 by Louisiana, 3,000 by Alabama, 2,500 by Florida and 6,000 by Mississippi).

On May 5, BP announced that it had stopped the flow of oil from one of the three existing leak points on the damaged oil well and riser in the Gulf of Mexico. BP made plans to deploy the cofferdam, a 125-ton, 14' x 24' x 40' structure to be set over the end of the riser (the pipe that normally goes from the wellhead to the drilling ship). The top of the containment system would be connected to a 5,000 foot pipe that would convey the collected hydrocarbons to the surface ship, the *Deepwater Enterprise*. BP announced that it had made $25 million block grants to each of the states of Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi and Florida to help accelerate the implementation of Area Contingency Plans (ACPs). These approved plans address the removal of a worst case spill and are designed to mitigate or prevent a substantial threat to sensitive areas.

On May 6, 2010 officials at NOAA announced that oil had reached the Chandeleur Islands off the coast of Louisiana. One airplane and two water-based teams were dispatched to the islands to disburse the sheen. At this point 788,171 feet of boom have been installed in coastal areas, with nearly 250,000 feet deployed on May 5th alone. Nearly 1.5 million feet of boom remain available in staging areas. More than 250,000 gallons of dispersant have been applied to surface of the slick and roughly 30,000 barrels (1,250,000 gallons) of oil-water mix have been recovered.

On May 7, 2010, crews began the process of lowering the cofferdam over the leaking riser. NOAA modified and expanded the boundaries of the closed fishing area to better reflect the current location of the oil spill, and extended the fishing restriction until May 17, 2010. After having deployed approximately 15, 354 gallons of subsea dispersants, EPA halted subsea dispersant operations, awaiting additional test results in order to resume. Secretary of the

Interior Salazar announced that no applications for drilling permits will go forward for any new offshore drilling activity until the Department of the Interior completes the safety review process that President Obama has requested. At this point more than 10,000 volunteers are currently responding to protect the shoreline and wildlife, approximately 829,000 of feet of boom have been deployed to contain the spill, and more than 1.9 million gallons of an oil-water mix have been recovered

On May 8, 2010, BP announced that while lowering the cofferdam over the riser, an excess of hydrate crystals formed inside the dome, preventing the dome from being successfully placed over the leaking riser. The dome remains on the sea bed floor while BP evaluates current conditions. Meanwhile, shoreline crews discovered tar balls on Dauphin Island, off the coast of Alabama.

As of May 9, 2010, efforts to secure the cofferdam over the leaking riser continued. The first two oiled birds discovered as a result of the spill have been cleaned and released. At this point more than 1 million feet of boom has been deployed, 3.4 million gallons of oily water have been recovered, 300,000 gallons of dispersant have been used, and 13 staging areas have been set up along the coasts of Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama, in order to prepare sensitive shoreline for possible oil contamination.[1]

II. WITNESSES

The following witnesses have been invited to testify:

- **Mr. Steve Newman**
  President and CEO
  Transocean Limited

- **Lamar Mackay**
  Chairman and President
  BP America, Inc.

- **Tim Probert**
  President, Global Business Lines
  Chief Health, Safety, and Environmental Officer
  Halliburton

- **Jack B. Moore**
  Director, President and CEO
  Cameron International

[1] Daily updates may be found at the Deepwater Horizon Response website (http://www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com/go/site/2931/).