

Last Thursday, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano declared the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico "a spill of national significance."

The situation presents one of the greatest potential threats to our local economy and environment we've faced and I am deeply concerned.

As of April 30, the damaged oil well was leaking 5,000 barrels, or over 200,000 gallons, of oil a day. The growing oil slick is already washing ashore along the Louisiana coast.

For a region which is home to 30 percent of U.S. crude oil production and over 10 percent of natural gas production, the Gulf of Mexico has experienced relatively few accidents that have threatened our coastal communities and the ecosystem. But no place is totally immune from a catastrophic event.

On April 28, I met with Lamar McKay, president and chairman of BP America in my office in Washington. I called upon him to expend every effort to stabilize the situation in the Gulf.

Mr. McKay was unequivocal in his commitment to use every resource that BP – and the entire oil and gas industry – has to stop the leak and to prioritize both containment and clean-up from this unfortunate accident.

Additionally, I am in contact with the federal agencies involved and have plans to fly out over the site with the Coast Guard as soon as possible.

Naturally, my office has also been in close communication with our local and state emergency management team, as well as our coastal leaders. While everyone realizes this spill has the potential to be as devastating to the Gulf Coast as a major hurricane, our hopes and prayers are certainly that it will not be.

As you can imagine, the entire regional economy could be affected, from shrimpers, to oystermen, commercial and recreational fishermen, restaurateurs, hotel and condominium resort managers, and realtors, to name just a few.

I have encouraged BP to use every option available to contain and control this substantial and growing oil spill.

Please visit my website at <http://bonner.house.gov> for further updates on the spill and federal and local efforts to address damage and clean-up.

Congress Shouldn't Force Puerto Rican Statehood Vote:

It's not every day that folks in South Alabama flood my office phone lines about potential elections in Caribbean islands, but last week was an exception. Quite a few callers from South Alabama contacted me to voice opposition to a bill before the U.S. House that would prompt a special election in Puerto Rico that could lead to statehood.

The legislation, known as the Puerto Rico Democracy Act, authorizes a federally sanctioned vote by the people of Puerto Rico over their island's political status. While we are all in favor of democracy, it is not clear how the people of Puerto Rico are served by Congress telling them they need to vote on their future.

As a U.S. Commonwealth, Puerto Rico enjoys the right to hold its own elections and decide its status. In fact, the people of Puerto Rico have three times before voted to remain a commonwealth – rejecting calls for statehood.

The legislation which passed the U.S. House last Thursday would set in motion a two stage plebiscite to allow the people of Puerto Rico to decide whether to keep their present political status as a commonwealth or go in a new direction. If a majority of the voters favor a change, then a second vote would be called in which voters would be able to choose between independence, free association with the U.S., or statehood.

This process is flawed on several levels. For starters, Congress has no business promoting a vote on Puerto Rico's political status. Alaska and Hawaii entered the Union after a clear majority of the people of those territories voted to do so without any federal prompting. It was only after their elections that Congress got involved, voting to admit each.

Ironically, the two votes that are promoted by the House bill would force a final decision based on which choice gets the most votes, even if the total is well below 50 percent.

I voted against this misguided bill and believe the people of Puerto Rico should be free to choose when they want to determine their status.

No Congressional Pay Raise:

In these tough economic times Congress should not be raising its pay. I believe that lawmakers should lead by example. Accordingly, last Thursday I joined 401 other members of the U.S. House in voting to deny Congress a pay raise this year. This represents the second year in a row that Congress has barred itself from receiving a pay increase.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.