

On Friday, May 7, British Petroleum (BP) lowered a 100 ton pollution control chamber, 5,000 feet below the surface of the Gulf of Mexico in order to stem the oil flow that has gushed from a damaged well for over two weeks now. Should this unprecedented deep water maneuver prove successful, much of the leaking oil will be directed to a ship one mile overhead for safe storage.

Like most of you, I have been watching these developments very closely and want to see that no option is overlooked in order to gain control over this very serious situation. I also believe that our citizens deserve a more timely and better coordinated response from the federal government.

As this catastrophic event slowly unfolded, it has been my strong belief we did not receive the prompt federal attention such a major crisis commands. Already we've heard comparisons being made to the federal response to Hurricane Katrina.

Gulf Coast residents have every right to be disappointed that it took a week before the Obama administration declared a "spill of national significance" and cabinet level officials were dispatched to the scene.

Were it not for the involvement of the U.S. Coast Guard – which has done a completely professional job – there would not have been a major federal reaction to this disaster for days.

With approximately 3,500 oil platforms in the Gulf – generating nearly a third our nation's oil output – we've not had to face many threats as significant as this one before.

Over the last 40 years, the only incident involving an oil rig that comes close is the 1979 blowout of the Ixtoc-1 exploratory oil well off the coast of Mexico, which discharged over 100 million gallons of oil before it was shut off. Ironically, most of our Gulf Coast was more focused that year on another disaster, Hurricane Frederic.

Rare or not, the threat our coastal communities face from the oil spill is very real. Therefore, it was encouraging to see U.S. Coast Guard commandant Admiral Thad Allen finally taking the lead of the coordinated response team. Admiral Allen has the proven leadership ability and is very familiar with the Gulf Coast. I had the opportunity to speak with him on May 7 and expressed my desire to work closely to address local needs.

While, as of this writing, no oil had washed up on our Alabama coastline, already our local economy is beginning to feel the impact of the spill.

Gulf fishermen have been barred from portions of federal waters for ten days, and there is uncertainty as to the long-term effect of the spill on practically every aspect of our local economy, especially the shrimp and oyster industries, not to mention tourism.

Working Closely With Local Officials:

My staff and I are continuing to monitor the potential impact of the spill on Mobile and Baldwin counties. We have met with officials across the area, including Bayou La Batre, Orange Beach,

Gulf Shores and Dauphin Island, and we have made visits to the Baldwin County Emergency Operations Center as well as the Unified Command Center in downtown Mobile. I am firmly committed to assisting state and local officials in seeking the help they need to protect the environment and our economy.

Over the last few days, I have also personally met with the president of BP America, calling on his company to do everything possible to stop the oil spill and fulfill its financial obligations.

I have flown over the area of the oil spill with Mississippi Congressman Gene Taylor and have encouraged Governor Riley to use every asset the state has to help oversee the state's damage prevention and clean up logistical efforts in Baldwin and Mobile counties.

While there is still much that can be done by both the government and the oil company, it is up to individuals and businesses that might be impacted by the oil spill to be proactive in keeping detailed and accurate records in order to file claims.

Special thanks go to the thousands of volunteers who are helping to prepare our coastline in the event the spill continues to threaten our treasured environment.

Oil Spill Damage Claims Information:

British Petroleum (BP) is naturally responsible for processing and paying reasonable damage claims. BP can be reached for claims by calling 1-800-440-0858, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. BP personnel will respond to each call with information on how to submit a claim.

For more information, I encourage you to visit my web site and click the "[Gulf Spill Information and Resources Link](#)" on the main page. This site will be continually updated.

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.