

Three weeks after the capping of the Deepwater Horizon oil leak, our beautiful beaches are returning to their familiar sugar white sands and turquoise surf that have made the Gulf Coast famous. The only thing missing is you.

Recent news reports say beach occupancy rates have fallen to less than 50 percent as tourists, scared away by outdated television images, have no idea that those once oiled shorelines have been cleaned and the bright orange coastal boom are being removed as conditions improve and the threat of oily tides fades away.

Even as we enter the first week of August, it's still not too late to make plans for a memorable family vacation on Alabama's beaches where everyone, from condo owners and hotel operators, to local restaurateurs and gift shop owners - is going out of their way to ensure your stay will be the hallmark of your summer.

From now until Labor Day, you can't beat the fun and seafood along Orange Beach, Gulf Shores, Fort Morgan and Dauphin Island.

Come on down to the beach and enjoy the final days of summer!

Focus Shifts to Rebuilding Economy:

As much as we want to welcome the departure of the oil polluting our Gulf, the news still brings little comfort to our region which is reeling from the loss of billions of critical summer tourist dollars. Nothing short of full, immediate compensation from BP will prevent many businesses from going under.

It is absolutely unacceptable that many South Alabama businesses have gotten little to no claims payments from BP after waiting for months.

Gulf Shores Mayor Robert Craft highlighted this problem during testimony last Thursday before the U.S. House Financial Services Committee. "Every business located on the island is directly affected by this disaster and has suffered loss. There are no exceptions. From the beginning of this disaster our community has been assured that we would be made whole by BP. This has not occurred," Craft told the committee.

Gulf residents and business owners have lost patience with bureaucrats and BP claims payers who have no sense of urgency.

I recently met with Kenneth Feinberg, who was appointed by President Obama to lead the Gulf oil spill economic damage claims payments process. I made it clear to Mr. Feinberg that Gulf businesses, and our entire coastal economy, cannot survive the loss of summer tourism dollars without adequate and immediate compensation from the, as yet, unfunded BP escrow account.

If we've learned anything from the tragic Deepwater Horizon accident, it's that Alabama and other Gulf states cannot face the threat of another such disaster as unprepared as we were this time. The federal and BP response was not enough. Alabama must have the resources to

position coastal protection systems in advance of oil spill threats.

In response, I introduced legislation on July 29 calling on the federal government to speed up additional Gulf oil and gas lease royalty payments which are due the State of Alabama, but under current law will not be paid to our state until 2017. We need these funds now.

House Honors Monroeville's Harper Lee and 'Mockingbird':

On July 26, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation I introduced honoring the 50th anniversary of the publication of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

I was proud to lead the House in paying tribute to one of the greatest novels of the 20th century and also affording appropriate recognition to its author, Monroeville's own Nelle Harper Lee.

As I noted in my floor speech during the House debate, on the 50th anniversary of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the people of Monroeville, Monroe County and all across Alabama could not be more proud of our favorite daughter and her lasting legacy.

The Pulitzer prize-winning South Alabama author's words have not only inspired generations, but in a very real way, have helped to change our nation – and the world – for the better.

A half century after the ink has dried on the first edition of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, its pages still call to our better instincts of decency and fairness to our fellow man, while reminding us that prejudice, though too common, must continue to be confronted.

I recall attending the 2007 White House ceremony during which President George Bush presented Harper Lee with the Presidential Medal of Freedom – our nation's highest civilian award. During a reception for the honorees, a line stretching nearly the entire length of the White House formed so that ceremony attendees and even other award recipients could personally meet the remarkable lady from Monroeville and thank her for her special gift to mankind. It was a very touching moment.

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.