

On September 18, BP engineers permanently sealed the broken mile-deep oil well that has bedeviled our world for far too long. This milestone came three weeks after BP handed over its claims processing operations to an independent overseer.

While significant, these long-anticipated developments have not fully lifted the public's anxiety about what may still lie beneath the Gulf, nor have they restored local confidence that our economy will soon bounce back. Yet, in recent days we have witnessed hopeful signs that many who lost so much from this economic and environmental "Katrina" may see restitution.

The Gulf oil spill produced two disasters – one visible and one invisible. The visible impact of the disaster on our beaches and in the Gulf has received the most attention from the news media and has served to drive away vital tourism from our region.

With the physical closure of the blown out well and the removal of oil from our beaches, it is easy for the nation to overlook the other disaster – the unseen economic crisis that still haunts the minds and bank accounts of too many in coastal Alabama.

It has only been six weeks since Kenneth Feinberg took over the colossal task of administering the Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF), yet he is already a household name in South Alabama.

Undeniably, he has a tough job – one that many of us would not want.

But many believe, as I do, that the claims process has been too slow and inconsistent both under BP and for much of the transition under the new administrator.

On September 24, I wrote Mr. Feinberg to express my great frustration over reports of underpaid and rejected claims. Struggling business owners have been ignored by an overly restrictive and inconsistent bureaucratic claims process.

I wrote, "Since you have taken control of the administration of the claims process, payments have been slower, payment amounts have been limited, and denials have increased. My constituents – business owners and individuals alike – literally face the decision to shut their doors forever because their claims have been denied, or they can wait no longer for their claims to be paid by the GCCF.

On average, anecdotal evidence shows the GCCF is paying only 20 to 35 percent of the claim amounts, and denial of claims has increased significantly.

There appears to be no consistency or adequate justification provided for either."

On September 29, the local press reported that the GCCF had suddenly paid out nearly \$200 million in claims and area business owners were expressing relief. While it's too early to gauge the long-term performance of the claims payment process, it's certainly very encouraging to see the GCCF take more seriously its role in administering claims.

I am also heartened by Mr. Feinberg's pledge to reexamine past claims payments to determine

if supplemental payments are warranted. These are positive signs and I urge Mr. Feinberg to build on this progress to ensure that all claims are evaluated more quickly and fairly.

For those who have yet to file claims and who feel they are entitled to restitution, you can contact the GCCF toll free at 1-800-916-4893, or email them at [info@gccf-claims.com](mailto:info@gccf-claims.com). You can find more information, including local claims offices and on-line claims forms on the GCCF web site: <http://www.gulfcoastclaimsfacility.com/>.

### **Red Snapper Fishing Returns to the Gulf:**

Not a moment too soon, the long-delayed Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishing season began on Friday, October 1st. While Gulf fishing was curtailed for months after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, red snapper fishermen have suffered even greater hardship due to severe federally-imposed limitations on daily catches and a shortened fishing season.

I have continually voiced disapproval at the unrealistic red snapper fishing restrictions placed on our commercial and recreational fishermen. Local fisherman have long pointed out that red snapper are plentiful in the Gulf and tight catch limits imposed by the government are not a true reflection of the health of the snapper stock. Lang  
uage I introduced, encouraging the federal government to use independent data collection to

better determine red snapper populations, was included in the fiscal year 2010 consolidated appropriations act.

The fall red snapper season will run on the Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from October 1 through November 22. On the first day of the new red snapper season, I was pleased to join local fishermen as well as federal, state and local officials on a fishing trip in Alabama waters.

I am happy to report the red snapper were plentiful and delicious, just as expected.

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.