

A year and a half after the devastating Deepwater Horizon explosion and subsequent six-month fouling of our Gulf waters and beaches, our region's leaders are asking that the Gulf states not be left out when penalty fines are collected from those responsible for the 2010 disaster.

Last week, I joined Gulf Shores Mayor Robert Craft and fellow Gulf Coast lawmakers in testifying before Congress in support of a long-term recovery plan for our region in the wake of the 2010 oil spill. While many visible scars from the spill have healed, unseen damage will linger for years and can only be addressed with a comprehensive recovery strategy that balances economic and environmental restoration needs.

As I noted in my remarks to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee last Wednesday, the struggle to recover is far from over. Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas each suffered from the tragedy and lawmakers from all five Gulf states have joined together to seek long-term restoration funds from the companies culpable in the greatest manmade disaster in our country's history. The funds would come from fines levied against the responsible parties under the Clean Water Act.

In the months after the spill, BP – the owner of the Macondo well that blew out on April 20, 2010 – provided resources for Gulf and beach clean up as well as compensation to businesses and property owners who directly suffered as a result of the accident. While BP has worked with local and federal authorities to remove most of the visible damage from the spill, the longer term impact on our regional economy and environment hasn't been addressed. Of course, BP's damage claims fund, administered by Ken Feinberg, has continually slow walked the processing of paying legitimate claims for many who took major losses. Accordingly, the Justice Department has since agreed to my request for an independent audit of BP's Gulf Coast Claims Facility.

In addition to these immediate efforts, over the last year, state and local leaders from along the Gulf have joined with our local business community and environmental organizations to develop a comprehensive strategy to not only aid multi-year recovery of our Gulf region, but also to strengthen our resources and improve coordination in order to prepare for future disasters.

On October 5, 2011, House members from all five Gulf states, including myself, introduced the RESTORE Act in order to set in motion the process of channeling a majority of the Clean Water

Act fines in this case to the Gulf states for economic and environmental restoration and recovery. Although the federal government has yet to assess fines against BP, Halliburton, Transocean and others involved in the 2010 oil spill, it has been estimated that penalties could range from \$5 billion to \$20 billion.

Under present law, as established under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 in the aftermath of the Exxon Valdez spill, all civil penalties paid by the responsible parties go to replenish the federal Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund in order to pay for future oil spill response. However, to date, no spill has approached the magnitude of Deepwater Horizon and penalties have been much smaller in size. This increased revenue presents a boon to the federal government, rather than a necessary replenishment to the Trust Fund. The RESTORE Act seeks to prevent the government from gaining at the Gulf Coast's expense by directing 80 percent of these fines collected in the Deepwater Horizon case to a newly created Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund overseeing the distribution of funds to the five Gulf states. Similar legislation has also been introduced in the U.S. Senate.

During last week's Congressional hearing, Gulf Coast congressmen and local officials each made the case for devoting the majority of Clean Water Act funds to Gulf recovery. While I believe our arguments were strong, I was personally disappointed that the chairman of Transportation and Infrastructure Committee chairman appeared uninterested in our Gulf recovery proposal. To be sure, the effort to pass the RESTORE Act faces an uphill battle against apathetic, and frankly, ill-informed lawmakers from other regions who wish to spend the fine money on programs unrelated to the oil spill. But our efforts will not be deterred.

Our regional restoration plan has been given additional weight by the fact that a similar program was proposed by Navy Secretary Ray Mabus earlier this year. Secretary Mabus, who was appointed by President Obama in June of 2010 to draft a long-term recovery strategy, has also voiced support for the idea that Gulf restoration funding should come from Clean Water Act penalties levied against responsible parties in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Rest assured I will continue to work with my fellow lawmakers to press for adequate restoration funds for our region.

For release: December 12, 2011