

Finally, there appears to be a light at the end of the long dark tunnel the Gulf Coast has been traveling in order to secure our fair share of oil spill fine money to restore our regional environment and economy.

Last Thursday evening the U.S. House of Representatives passed an amendment that for the first time calls for the creation of a Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund to consist of 80 percent of all federal Clean Water Act fines paid by those responsible for the catastrophic Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

The House action represents the first vote in either the full House or Senate to advance the overall goal of returning the lion's share of oil spill fines to the Gulf Coast states which suffered direct and long-lasting damage nearly two years ago.

The RESTORE amendment was attached to the energy portion of the House's transportation reauthorization bill and passed by a simple voice vote. I was pleased to join with my fellow Gulf Coast lawmakers in drafting and voting for this very important amendment.

As I noted during my House floor remarks in support of the amendment, the federal government should not benefit from the tragedy that occurred in our back yard.

By going on record in passing the RESTORE amendment, the House sent a signal to the Justice and Treasury Departments that lawmakers agree that 80 percent of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill fines should be reserved in a trust fund for Gulf Coast restoration and should not be funneled away for unrelated federal spending.

While more extensive legislation has been introduced in the House and Senate to address the issue, neither bill has yet been scheduled for a vote. Last week's amendment vote, however, provides a way for lawmakers to move the ball forward while still working to pass the Gulf RESTORE Act bills in both the House and Senate in the coming months.

The Gulf Coast region continues to recover from the unwelcome upheaval that struck our shores in the spring of 2010. The longer term impact on our environment and economy has yet to be calculated. It is, therefore, essential that fines paid by BP and other responsible parties are set aside to address ongoing damage to our ecosystem and economy.

### **Payroll Tax Cuts Must Be Paid For**

On Friday, I joined all five of my House Republican colleagues in the Alabama congressional delegation in voting against an extension of the payroll tax cut without Congress first finding a way to pay for it. While I support continuing the current payroll tax holiday, I do not accept that the tax cut extension must be added to the overall federal budget deficit with no comparable spending cuts elsewhere.

In early December I voted for a bipartisan House bill that continued the payroll tax cut for another year. It also would have extended unemployment benefits for 13 months and patched a shortfall in Medicare payments to doctors. Most importantly, the tax cut extension was paid for. Unfortunately, Senator Harry Reid rejected this very good bill and forced the House to accept a watered down two-month extension while a longer bill could be negotiated.

Well, my friends, two months have passed and I see no significant progress in negotiations with the Senate. The bill we were offered on Friday simply adds over \$100 billion to the federal debt. Since payroll tax revenues go to support Social Security benefits, this means the debt obligation to Social Security will grow by another \$100 billion. This is unacceptable.

Let me repeat, I support extending the payroll tax cut provided we pay for it with spending cuts elsewhere. The House passed a good plan in early December that did just that and we could have done it again had Senator Reid and his colleagues given us a chance.

### **Stimulus Turns Three**

Last Friday marked a somber anniversary – the third year since President Obama's failed stimulus was signed into law.

We remember the president's promises that unemployment would not rise above eight percent, 3.5 million jobs would be saved or created with the passage of his stimulus program, and he would cut the deficit in half.

In hindsight, the biggest impact of \$1.2 trillion in stimulus spending has been the sea of red ink it has added to the federal debt. Three years after the stimulus was signed, unemployment has never dipped below eight percent, averaging 9.3 percent for the period. The nation has lost 1.1 million jobs since Mr. Obama took office, and the number of people on food stamps has reached an all time high.

I voted against the president's stimulus packages and continue to support House efforts this Congress to create jobs and free the economy from burdensome federal regulations.

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.

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