A month after the deadly attack on the American consulate in Benghazi, Libya, administration officials are finally admitting that they failed to adequately protect the facility and even turned down requests to bolster security months before. These admissions raise serious questions over the administration's strategy to protect our overseas interests and personnel.

Before a hearing of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee last week, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Charlene Lamb admitted to denying requests for additional security for U.S. diplomatic personnel in Libya. The September 11 attack on the American consulate in Benghazi left four personnel dead, including Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens.

Equally disturbing has been the administration's waffling over the cause of the attack. Days after the attack both White House spokesman Jay Carney and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice stated on network television news programs that the Libyan attack was seen as a reaction to the controversial film mocking the prophet Mohammed. On September 16, 2012, Ambassador Rice told NBC's Meet the Press that the events in Benghazi were viewed by the administration as "almost a copycat of the demonstrations against our facility in Cairo, which were prompted by the video." It wasn't until several days later when, faced with mounting evidence to the contrary, administration officials finally began to admit the deadly assault on our diplomatic post was a coordinated terror attack.

Congress is justifiably alarmed at the inability of the administration to accurately assess the cause of the attack and the resulting delay in securing consular facilities in the aftermath of the attack. Why were requests for additional security denied in the first place, and why didn't the administration anticipate that more security might be needed on September 11? Were administration statements tying the attack to the video the result of confusion or deliberate attempts to obfuscate the truth? Whether incompetence or a cover-up, these questions demand answers and Congress will continue to hold the administration accountable.

Standing Up for Justice for the Gulf Coast:

The U.S. Justice Department is reportedly close to inking a settlement with BP over penalties to be paid resulting from the international oil company's involvement in the tragic April 20, 2010, Gulf oil spill.

In recent days, published reports have suggested that the Obama administration is considering a deal that would allow BP to write off a portion of the fines, while the administration steers much of the money to an account over which it will have control. If true, the Justice Department will effectively make an end run around the RESTORE Act which was passed this summer and signed by President Obama. The RESTORE Act directs a majority of oil spill penalty funds to Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas for local environmental and economic restoration.

In response, I initiated a Gulf Coast congressional letter to Attorney General Eric Holder strongly opposing any action to circumvent the RESTORE Act at the expense of Gulf Coast communities. Last Thursday, I joined Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange, Senator Jeff Sessions and local leaders in speaking out on behalf of Alabama residents victimized by the Deepwater Horizon spill. Even as the Coast Guard reports the appearance of an oil sheen over the site of the Macondo well, it is indefensible for the administration to seek to divert funds Congress has approved for coastal communities' restoration efforts. Furthermore, how can the Obama administration justify awarding tax breaks to BP for its role in the worst man-made environmental disaster in the history of the Gulf of Mexico?

River Locks Agreement:

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently announced that it would effectively close its locks to recreational boat traffic along portions of the Alabama and Chattahoochee Rivers. The Corps' decision – which was reached without the input of Congress or the public – was the result of cost saving measures.

The Corps' new policy was understandably met with strong opposition from communities along the waterways and recreational boaters. In response, I joined the rest of the Alabama congressional delegation in sending a letter to the Corps voicing concern over the unilateral policy and requesting that it accommodate recreational traffic and allow for future economic development.

Last week, the Corps announced that it will keep locks open to all traffic. Effective, February 1, 2013, Alabama and Chattahoochee River locks will be manned 10 hours a day, four days a week. Locks will be closed on holidays and when the operators are on leave. Commercial river

traffic will have 24/7 access by appointment.

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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