GENE TAYLOR
4TH DISTRICT, MISSISSIPPI

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER AND
EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

http://www.house.gov/genetaylor

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–2404

2269 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515–2404
(202) 225–5772
FAX: (202) 225–7074

DISTRICT OFFICES:
2424 14TH STREET
GULFPORT, MS 39501
(228) 864–7670

701 MAIN STREET
SUITE 215
HATTIESBURG, MS 39401
(601) 582–3246

2900 GOVERNMENT STREET, SUITE B
OCEAN SPRINGS, MS 39564
(228) 872–7950

527 CENTRAL AVENUE
LAUREL, MS 39440
(601) 425–3905

412 HWY 90, SUITE 8
BAY ST. LOUIS, MS 39520
(228) 469–9235

June 10, 2010

Admiral Thad W. Allen
Commander, National Incident Command
2100 2nd Street, SW
Washington, DC 20593-7000

Dear Admiral Allen:

I write to express my concern that no coherent plan seems to be in place to prevent oil leaking from the BP Deepwater Horizon well-head into the Gulf of Mexico from making landfall on Mississippi's barrier islands and coastal beaches or in our state's estuaries.

On Monday June 7, 2010, I visited BP's primary equipment staging area in Mississippi located on Canal Road in Harrison County and one of the smaller Vessel of Opportunity operations sites located at Bayou Caddy in Hancock County. While impressed with the vast amount of equipment that is available at the staging area, I am concerned that an effective plan is not in place to deploy this equipment <u>before</u> oil impacts Mississippi's barrier islands, beaches and the Mississippi Sound.

I have a similar concern about the Vessels of Opportunity program. While I appreciate that many more local vessels have been hired through this program to observe and report the location of oil in large part due to Governor Barbour's request, hiring more people to report bad news is not enough. I strongly urge you to implement a more detailed operational plan to coordinate the efforts to locate any approaching oil and to deploy vessels with the clearly defined mission to collect the oil prior to it reaching Mississippi's islands, beaches, or estuaries.

If it is BP's plan to simply wait for land-based crews to react and begin to mobilize and deploy staged response equipment when oil is approaching their shores, then such a plan is unacceptable. The goal must be to prevent oil from reaching Mississippi's barrier islands, interior beaches, or estuaries. The way to do this is to intercept and remove the oil before it gets to us.

Accordingly, I am proposing an operational plan whereby vessels will be deployed in three layers. Farthest from the shore (located at a minimum distance of 5 miles south of Mississippi's barrier islands), boats participating in the Vessels of Opportunity Program should be deployed in a picket line fashion along the entire length of the State. These vessels will

conduct observation operations to spot oil heading for MS waters either washing up on the surface or popping up from below the surface. Once oil is spotted, these vessels will report the location to response vessels.

These efforts must be complemented with persistent observation of Mississippi Sound and adjacent waters through the use of all available resources including but not limited to satellites, air assets, and surface vessels. To date, I have seen no coordination between air operations and skimming vessels. It is imperative to implement an operational plan that coordinates the use of aerial spotters who can direct skimmer vessels to the oil.

Accordingly, I met with NASA Administrator Charles Bolden yesterday to enlist his agency's support to make available the use of NASA's remote sensing satellites to report the location of oil as it approaches our State's waters. He has agreed to provide such support.

In addition, my staff was briefed yesterday by Brigadier General James J. Muscatell, USAFR, Commander of the 403rd Air Wing located at Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Mississippi. General Muscatell brought to our attention the potential use of Stepped Frequency Microwave Radiometer (SFMR) technology, which can be used to measure oil thickness on the ocean surface. This information could be used to more efficiently direct surface skimmers to larger quantities of oil. The SFMR is among the suite of specialized instrumentation on the Air Force Reserve's Hurricane Hunter WC-130J aircraft and NOAA's P-3 weather aircraft. It is my understanding that NOAA is not currently gathering SFMR data on the spill. I believe that this is a mistake that should be resolved immediately.

The second layer of defense will be the response boats. At least half of your Vessels of Opportunity should be outfitted with skimming equipment and absorbent booms. These vessels will operate on 24 hour shifts (each vessel with a complement of a captain, a mate, and two deckhands that can maintain a 24 hour watch). These vessels will remain on station until relief vessels arrive. These vessels should be forward deployed at four locations adjacent to each of Mississippi's barrier islands in order to minimize response time. Charter boats or quarters barges should be deployed to provide overnight berthing for response vessel crews at locations near the Mississippi barrier islands at the following locations:

1) Smuggler's Cove at Cat Island;
2) Ship Island Harbor;
3) Western tip of Horn Island; and
4) Western tip of Petit Bois Island

I would also recommend that a third line of defense be established. This layer would be made up of another group of Vessels of Opportunity vessels which would patrol specific sectors in the Mississippi Sound. Again, these vessels would alert skimmer vessels and response crews

to any oil that makes it into the Mississippi Sound so that removal operations could begin before oil makes it to our beaches or estuaries.

I am ready to discuss this proposal with you or the appropriate persons at the National Incident Command at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,

Gene Taylor

GENE TAYLOR
Member of Congress

GT:sp

Cc: Mr. Tony Heyward, CEO BP
Honorable Haley Barbour, Governor, State of Mississippi