

SENATOR FRANK R. LAUTENBERG
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE HEARING ON BP LIABILITY
OPENING STATEMENT

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Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before this subcommittee on this critical issue.

Last night, the President spoke to the country, and he could not have been clearer: the needs of Gulf families, fishermen and business owners must not and will not take a backseat to B-P's bottom line.

I commend the President for his strong leadership on this disaster, and I know he will do everything in his power to hold B-P accountable.

The behavior of this company and its executives could not be more reprehensible.

Their greed and impudence led them to cut corners and gamble with the lives of workers on the rig, the marine life in the Gulf, and the economy of an entire region.

And when the inevitable happened and the Deepwater Horizon exploded, burned, and sank, B-P's leaders downplayed the true size of the spill and lied about their ability to contain it.

So we cannot trust them when they promise to pay for all the damage they have done.

We cannot simply take their word—not when B-P's C-E-O has repeatedly said the spill isn't that serious, calling the environmental impact—**QUOTE**—“very, very modest.”

Not when B-P said before the spill that they had the tools to stop a leak at this well.

**And not when the company's top executives promise to pay only for—
QUOTE—“legitimate claims.”**

Since the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded, as much as fifty (50) million gallons of oil have poured into the Gulf of Mexico—and it's threatening to turn the beaches, marshes and coastlines of the Gulf into toxic waste sites.

We've seen this kind of catastrophe before.

It's been more than twenty (20) years since the Exxon Valdez went aground, and oil is still contaminating the soil there.

That contamination does not only continue to hurt the fishermen there—it is still damaging the area's ground, water and marine life to this very day.

I was one of the first senators to visit Alaska after the Exxon Valdez crash, and I saw the destruction caused by that oil spill firsthand.

When the press coverage was intense, Exxon issued a string of apologies, it promised to do right by the communities, and it vowed to make sure the way of life these Alaskans knew would resume.

But as soon as the cameras were shut off—Exxon changed its tune.

It fought the communities, the families and the fishermen over every penny.

Instead of making those victims whole, Exxon chose to make its lawyers rich.

Exxon drew things out for years and knocked down claims from five (5) billion dollars to five hundred (500) million.

We cannot let history repeat itself.

That is why I proposed an amendment to last month's emergency supplemental bill to make it clear that the companies responsible for the oil spill must reimburse the American taxpayer for every dollar the government spends on cleanup.

While the amendment was not considered on the floor, the Obama Administration has made it clear that it will send B-P the bill.

Polluters—not taxpayers—should pay these government expenses.

When you make a mess, you have to pay to clean it up—it's that simple.

I want to put the oil executives here on notice: we will not accept any answer from you that smacks of something like the check is in the mail.

Americans are fed up with hollow words, false assurances and broken promises.

That is why B-P should start putting money into an escrow account to pay for the damage from this spill—and not pay over ten (10) billion dollars in dividends to its shareholders.

And that is why we've got to take the critical step of eliminating the measly seventy-five (75) million dollar liability cap on monetary damages from oil spills.

I joined Senator Menendez right after the Deep Horizon rig exploded to lift that cap—and it's time our colleagues on the other side of the aisle let us move that legislation forward.

Big Oil makes so much in profit every month—they can afford to pay for their recklessness.

I want to thank the Chairman and the rest of the committee for inviting me to speak today, and more importantly, for holding this critical hearing.

And I hope we will hear honest and candid answers from B-P and the other executives about what they are going to do to live up to their obligations.