

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Ed Markey
Committee on Natural Resources
September 13, 2012**

Two weeks ago, Hurricane Isaac hit the Gulf of Mexico. It delayed the Republican National Convention, and caused serious flooding and destruction in Louisiana. The storm also uncovered mats of oil left over from the BP spill. Tar balls of BP oil washed up on beaches in Louisiana and Alabama two years after the gushing well was killed.

In our Committee, the question is, are we going to investigate this matter? I doubt it.

Instead of tracking the oil that is still staining Gulf beaches, the Republican leadership of this Committee is still tracking the changes made to a two-year-old report. This track change investigation is a distraction from the real damage of the BP spill.

The Interior Department completed this report in the middle of a crisis. The BP Deepwater Horizon rig had just exploded. Oil was still gushing into the Gulf of Mexico. The President needed input about how to respond, and he needed answers fast. In preparing the report, the Interior Department enlisted the advice of external peer reviewers and consultants, most with ties to the offshore drilling industry.

The Majority has obsessed over the objections of some reviewers, which the Department of Interior has long since addressed, about language involving the six-month drilling pause, which has long since ended. Yet the reviewers uniformly praised the quality of the report and its other critical safety recommendations, including those to prevent the failure of blowout preventers, ensure deepwater well control, and enhance safety testing and inspections.

Our job here in Congress is to pass legislation, provide funding, and exercise oversight to make sure needed reforms like these are put in place. We also are being counted on to hold BP and its contractors accountable for the damage they've caused. Unfortunately, this Republican Congress has acted like the BP spill never happened. They have put oil above all, even above the safety of the American people.

This Congress has voted 148 times to preserve or provide giveaways to the oil industry—including legislation approved by this Committee to expand risky offshore drilling all along the East and West coasts—without passing a single piece of legislation to fix the safety problems exposed by the BP spill. What's worse, to avoid required defense cuts that Republicans voted for, the sequestration delay bill they are bringing to the floor today would, like the Ryan budget, slash everything else, including safety inspections for offshore drilling.

To say this Committee's oversight has been underwhelming would be charitable. This Committee has held just one obligatory hearing with mid-level executives from BP, Transocean and Halliburton. We in the Minority asked to issue subpoenas to compel testimony from the no-show CEOs. But the only subpoenas the Majority has issued having anything to do with the BP spill relate to the editing of the report we are talking about today.

The Majority has insinuated that Administration officials intentionally misrepresented the views of the report's peer reviewers about the six-month drilling pause—even though DOI's Office of Inspector General found no evidence of this.

For the last year and a half, this is what our Committee has been investigating. Not what killed 11 workers on the Deepwater Horizon rig. Not what caused more than four million barrels of oil to gush into the Gulf of Mexico. Not what's causing more of that oil to wash up on the beaches today. And not what has been done since to make sure this never happens again.

This is worse than misplaced priorities. This is dereliction of duty of this committee to the citizens of the Gulf of Mexico.