

Opening Statement of Rep. Edward J. Markey
EMR Legislative Hearing on MMS Reorganization
September 15, 2011

Next Monday will mark the one year anniversary of the silencing of BP's blown-out Macondo oil well. But the lessons of the Deepwater Horizon tragedy still ring loud and clear.

The Minerals Management Service, as the agency regulating offshore drilling was known, had become dysfunctional. Relationships with industry had become too cozy. Safety inspectors and regulators had become too complacent. And during the eight years of the Bush administration, the agency was woefully underfunded and left to deteriorate, because the oil and gas interests were happy to have fewer cops on the regulatory beat.

Today, the MMS is no more. At the beginning of next month, the Interior Department will complete the task of splitting the agency into three parts -- finally separating the safety, revenue, and permit functions that had grown too incestuous.

Now we are at a crossroads. We have a choice to make -- when the reorganization is complete, will those three parts resemble the three wise men or the three stooges.

The reorganization that the Interior Department has nearly completed would elevate safety, as the independent BP commission recommended. In contrast, the Discussion Draft circulated by the Republican majority would disrupt the reforms occurring at our new drilling agency and legislatively repeat the mistake of elevating energy production while shortchanging safety.

You don't have to be Dick Tracy to see the speed over safety pattern running through the offshore drilling bills the Majority has pushed in this Congress.

The Majority has introduced bills that would put a shot clock on the review of new drilling permits; Legislation that would open up our East and West Coasts to drilling without putting new safety standards in place; and legislation that would deem the same flawed environmental reviews conducted by the inadequate MMS as sufficient for new drilling.

Even the simple and common-sense requirement that oil companies pay for the inspections of their own rigs has been rejected by the Republican Majority.

Yesterday, the Government's Joint Investigative Team, considered to be the final authoritative study on the matter, released its report.

Republican leaders told us that they would reserve judgment until after all the facts are in. Well that day has come.

I am pleased that the Chairman has announced a hearing with members of the Joint Investigative Team. But this Committee needs to also hear from the companies involved in the spill – BP, Haliburton, Transocean and Cameron.

And this Committee needs to do more to respond to the spill than simply codify the division of the MMS. This Committee should enact all the safety reforms recommended by the independent blue-ribbon commission. I have introduced legislation with Ranking Member Holt that would implement the Commission's recommendations but the Majority has not held hearings or advanced that legislation.

We have heard from the independent BP Commission. We have heard from the government's Joint Investigative Team. There is no longer any excuse for this Committee and this Congress to delay action on the broad reforms that are needed to take the lessons and turn them into laws so that we never have a disaster like this again.

I yield back.