Detecting and Mitigating Oil Spills

Background

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill has revealed that the nation's oil companies have spent very little money, when compared to their record-breaking profits, to prevent and respond to oil spills. Instead, the technologies employed by BP to respond to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill are essentially the same ones that Exxon was using to respond to the Exxon Valdez spill twenty years ago. The CEO of ExxonMobil has even stated under oath the oil industry is not "well equipped" to respond to oil spills in deep water.

Need

The seriousness of the disaster of the Gulf of Mexico demonstrates the need for Congress to promote improvements in oil spill response technologies and mandate that oil companies have the ability to prevent and respond to domestic oil spills. The need to mandate these improvements is underscored by the fact that the oil companies, through their oil spill response plans, had provided assurances that they could respond to a worst case oil discharge.

Legislation

In order to help address this problem, the Clean Energy Jobs and Oil Company Accountability Act would direct revenues from oil companies to fund Federal inter-agency research and development efforts. The bill would also provide for:

- Improved research and development of innovative oil pollution reduction technologies, especially under worst-case release scenarios;
- A science and technology advisory board, in coordination with the National Academy of Sciences, that would help identify knowledge gaps related to oil spill detection and mitigation;
- Oil discharge demonstration projects for the purpose of developing and demonstrating new integrated deepwater oil discharge mitigation and response systems;
- Oil flow monitoring and calculation demonstration projects for improving the response capabilities to deepwater oil discharges;

- Research centers that would specialize in the containment and clean up of oil spills in a variety of extreme conditions, including deepwater and ultra deepwater; and

- Research centers that would specialize in the behavior, effects, and damage assessment of oil spills and related restoration needs.