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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of
House Natural Resources Committee
Ranking Member Doc Hastings
Full Committee Markup of H.R. 3534, The CLEAR Act
July 14, 2010

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When it comes to the Gulf oil spill, it couldn't be clearer what the focus of Congress should be right now: making certain the well is permanently capped, the oil is cleaned up, BP is held fully responsible, that the people of the Gulf states get all the support they need, and that we get to the bottom of what happened so we can make the informed and complete reforms needed to ensure American offshore drilling is the safest in the world.

Unfortunately, this bill does not have this focus and does not achieve these priorities. In fact, what this bill actually does is totally ignore efforts to get to the bottom of why this spill happened, and charges ahead without real answers. And it uses the oil spill as an opportunity to try and pass page after page of new rules and laws on matters totally unrelated to the oil spill or offshore drilling.

The President's Commission just had its first meeting on Monday of this week, yet with this bill, Democrats in Congress are already making major rewrites to offshore drilling policies without even knowing the results of the Commission's investigation, or other investigations. Reforms are clearly needed, but Congress shouldn't get ahead of the facts. To ensure it makes the right reforms, Congress must first know exactly what caused and contributed to this disaster. There is so much we don't know.

For example, the fail safe device – the blowout preventer is still a mile under the ocean. Specific changes to the law may be needed relating to blowout preventer devices. But how do we know? The equipment hasn't yet been retrieved or examined. Why have a Presidential Commission, and why did the House pass bills giving the Commission subpoena authority and millions of dollars to do its work...if this bill and Committee aren't willing to consider their findings on what happened? This ignores the multiple other investigations that are underway.

Even more outrageous is this bill's attempt to use the oil spill tragedy as leverage to enact totally unrelated policies and increase federal spending on unrelated programs by billions of dollars. What does a solar panel in Nevada, a wind turbine in Montana, uranium for nuclear power, or a ban on fish farming have to do with the Gulf spill? Nothing – but the spill is a good excuse to try and pass otherwise stalled or unpopular new laws.

This is precisely the intent behind the Administration's call to use the oil spill to pass cap-and-trade legislation. We sit here today considering this bill with zero assurance that this supposed oil spill bill isn't being setup as a vehicle to enact a job-killing cap-and-trade national energy tax. While the bill has already been loaded up with unrelated energy provisions, where is the assurance and promise that the Waxman-Markey or Kerry-Lieberman national energy tax bills won't be in the final legislation? There isn't any. What we do have is a prime time Oval Office speech by the President where he outlined his support for just such a plan.

And all of these changes in the bill --- those that refuse to wait for the facts on what caused this tragedy, and those that seek to monopolize on the disaster to enact new, unrelated policies and spending -- there is no understanding of what impact they will have on jobs and the economy. In these tough economic times and with the Gulf coast already reeling from the spill, Congress should know what effect proposed new laws would have on American jobs, the economy, and hurting Gulf Coast families and communities. Congress should be acting to improve the situation in the Gulf, not make it worse. Congress must take the care to ensure that reforms, especially the many premature and unrelated ones in this bill, will not cause greater economic damage than what is already being felt in the Gulf and across the nation.

I will offer an amendment to remove all of the premature and unrelated provisions in this bill, and Mr. Cassidy will be offering an amendment regarding the impact on jobs and the economy. I urge my colleagues to support these amendments as their adoption would substantially improve this bill by focusing it squarely on the most pressing priorities.

Congress must first know what caused the disaster and then respond appropriately. Congress shouldn't just be making reforms for headlines and political purposes. Congress should make the right reforms to ensure American drilling is the safest in the world and Americans' good-paying jobs aren't sent overseas.

I yield back the balance of my time.