

U.S. Rep. C. W. Bill Young Introduces the SAFEGUARDS Act to Address Breakdowns that Led to the Gulf Oil Spill Disaster

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Washington – U.S. Rep. C. W. Bill Young (R-FL) introduced the SAFEGUARDS Act (Secure All Facilities to Effectively Guard the United States Against and Respond to Dangerous Spills) Thursday night to provide common sense solutions to prevent oil spill disasters and improve the federal response in the event of another one. This legislation was crafted after several meetings with the on the ground incident commanders, including the Coast Guard both at the national level and in the Saint Petersburg Command as well as other federal, state and local emergency responders.

“The SAFEGUARDS Act addresses some of the systematic breakdowns which led to the BP Deepwater Horizon catastrophe,” Young said.

In a statement upon introducing the bill in the House, Young outlined its main points:

“First, this legislation will ensure that National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements are not ignored again as they were in the case of the permits issued for Deepwater Horizon, by prohibiting any categorical waivers of NEPA, and by extending the time period regulatory agencies have to review oil exploration proposals. Regulatory agencies currently have only 30 days to review extensive and intricate drilling proposals. My bill will give regulatory agencies up to 150 days to ensure exploration plans are properly reviewed.

“Second, it will prevent the situation with Deepwater Horizon where the company was allowed to begin drilling without a prepared response plan in the event of a failure of the blowout preventer. My legislation requires that there must be a full-scale response plan in place and that the oil spill response plan must account for a true worst case scenario, including the uncontrolled discharge of oil resulting from the failure of a blowout preventer or other containment devices.

“Third, my legislation addresses the federal chain of command for emergency response and containment efforts. While the Coast Guard is ultimately responsible for leading the government’s response to an oil spill in America’s coastal waters, they are not required to approve oil spill response plans submitted by oil rigs. Instead, each rig is required to submit their spill response plans to the Minerals Management Service, an agency we learned has had many well-documented issues with administering rig safety standards. The Coast Guard must be involved at all levels of the planning and permitting stage to ensure a fully coordinated response effort. If the Coast Guard has to clean up the spills, they should have the authority to review and certify the clean up plans ahead of time. The SAFEGUARDS Act will make this a requirement for all current and future oil

rigs, as well as to establish the Commandant of the Coast Guard as the National Incident Commander to oversee the federal government's response to large oil spills in coastal waters.

“Finally, my legislation addresses inadequacies in federal response efforts highlighted by the current spill. The framework of the National Contingency Plan, which is the federal government response plan for all oil spills, has not been updated since 1994. The SAFEGUARDS Act will require the response plan to be updated at least every five years. Further, this bill will require the EPA to begin monitoring water quality within 48 hours after an oil spill is discovered. It is important for the public to have accurate information about how our water, our wildlife and our beaches are being affected as quickly as possible.”

Young has asked the chairmen of the committees drafting comprehensive oil spill legislation to include his common sense solutions in any final package they bring before the House later this summer.

The Florida Congressman has a long history of responding to threats to the environment caused by oil spills and offshore oil exploration. As a Florida State Senator, he drafted landmark legislation in 1970 to set in place emergency response plans for oil spills in the waterways surrounding Florida. This was in response to the February 1970 oil spill from the tanker Delian Appolon, which spilled 20,000 gallons of crude oil into Tampa Bay. Young's law, enacted later that year, was challenged all the way to the United States Supreme Court, where it was upheld in a unanimous decision.

It was also Young in 1983 who offered an amendment to an appropriations bill creating the first buffer zone to protect Florida's west coast from offshore oil drilling. He had to defend his provision year after year in annual appropriations bills until he was able to help negotiate a more permanent protection of Florida's coastline in 2006. That law now provides a 234 mile buffer zone of protection for Pinellas County's beaches.