



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

April 29, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Each day the Deepwater Horizon test well gushes oil into the Gulf of Mexico, the oil industry's claims about modern, safe and environmentally friendly technology become more and more unbelievable.

Even as I write this letter, I'm informed that new oil has been found leaking at the rig disaster site and that, at this rate, if the spill continues for a month it may be nearly as large as the Exxon Valdez. If the crude leaking from the well starts washing ashore in the coming days, it may be an environmental and economic disaster that wreaks havoc for commercial fishing and tourism along the Gulf of Mexico coast.

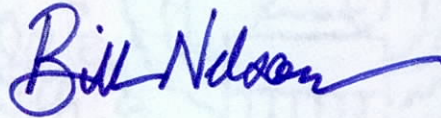
Your focus rightly is on containing and responding to this spill. But until we learn what happened, I'm asking that you also call for an immediate halt to test wells and all other exploratory operations in coastal waters. Such a pause should remain in effect pending the outcome of federal investigations into the cause of this incident and the identification of ways to prevent something similar from happening again. Meantime, I am filing legislation that would for the time being prohibit the Interior Department from acting on your administration's plans to expand offshore drilling, including seismic testing and other exploratory operations. This, of course, isn't intended to affect producing wells.

Mr. President, the Interior Department in 2000 issued an alert insisting oil companies have "reliable backup systems" in the event of a rig blowout. But a decision reportedly was made in 2003 not to call for an additional line of defense – a move that will almost certainly be among the matters to come under scrutiny in the congressional investigation I and others have initiated. Today I am asking the Interior Department's inspector general to look specifically into this decision not to require the aforementioned backup system aimed at preventing rig disasters.

It's unclear whether any additional well shut-off controls would have made a difference in this case. But the questions about the practices of the oil industry raised in the wake of this still-unfolding incident require that you postpone indefinitely plans for expanded offshore drilling operations.

As I have argued for decades, drilling too close to the coast poses too great a threat to the economy and environment of Florida and other coastal states.

Sincerely,



Bill Nelson

cc: Sen. Jay Rockefeller, chairman, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation