

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS
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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
“The BP Oil Spill and Gulf Coast Tourism: Assessing the Impact”
Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection
July 27, 2010

The BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is the worst environmental disaster this country has seen. While we have every hope that the cap will hold and the flow of oil into the Gulf has truly stopped, we know that the devastation is enormous and its effects will continue for years.

In the three months since the Deepwater Horizon explosion and blowout, the Committee on Energy and Commerce has held eight hearings examining the causes of the explosion, efforts to mitigate the damage, and the impacts on the environment and the local community.

I'd like to thank Chairman Rush for holding our ninth hearing, which will focus on the impacts of the spill on tourism and the tourism economy of the Gulf States. The economies of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida are heavily dependent on the travelers who come to the Gulf Coast beaches each summer for swimming, fishing, and other activities. Across each of these four states, some beaches are closed and significant fishing grounds are still off-limits. Hotels, restaurants, charter boats, and resorts are facing cancellations. Tourists are shying away from the areas of the Gulf even where no oil has come ashore. Diners and grocery shoppers across America are asking about whether the seafood is from the Gulf and whether it is safe to eat.

Today, we will hear from tourism officials and businesses from each of the four states dealing with this catastrophe. We will also hear from Kenneth Feinberg, the independent administrator in charge of handling all claims for damage and loss from the oil spill. He is responsible for determining the proper level of compensation for each business, worker, and family impacted by the spill.

This hearing will give the Committee a better understanding of the impacts of the spill on an essential part of the Gulf Coast economy, and also help us understand what we can do further to help the region recover. I thank all the witnesses for joining us today and look forward to their testimony.