

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SUITE 2321 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301
(202) 225-6375
<http://science.house.gov>

June 24, 2010

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The national tragedy unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico is impacting the lives of millions in the Gulf Region and has attracted the attention of the entire nation. In the months following the Deepwater Horizon accident, BP, as well as federal, state, and local authorities, have sought to halt the flow of the ruptured wellhead, contain leaking oil and natural gas, prevent oil from reaching nearby shores and wetlands, and mitigate the effects of the spill on the Gulf's ecosystem. These are clearly daunting tasks. Despite the complexity involved, it is the responsibility of BP, along with federal, state, and local governments to meet these challenges. In order to surmount this hurdle, all parties need to know they are receiving the best scientific and technical advice possible – guidance free from political meddling or special interest motivations. Because I feel so strongly that the investigation, amelioration, and remediation of the Deepwater Horizon incident should be guided by unfettered scientific and technical advice, I am deeply concerned with a number of instances that have come to light in the wake of this accident.

The Science and Technology Committee is no stranger to Commissions tasked with investigating complex technical incidents. That is why I was confused when your Administration announced the membership of the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling.¹ Previous Commissions established to investigate accidents such as the *Challenger* and *Columbia* Shuttle accidents all benefited from vast and broad technical expertise.² Unfortunately, I believe the Commission, and ultimately the American people, would benefit from representation by more technical and scientific members who have not already come to conclusions before being presented with all the facts.³ Press reports have already cited comments from Commission members detailing their conclusions and hinting at what their findings and conclusions will be – before ever being presented with details and facts relating to the incident.⁴

The conclusions, findings, and recommendations presented by previous commissions were readily accepted and routinely implemented because Congress and the American people trusted that the work

¹ White House Press Release, Subject: President Obama Announces Members of the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling Commission, June 14, 2010.

² "Investigation of the Challenger Accident", Hearing before the Committee on Science and Technology, House of Representatives, June 10, 1986

"Space Shuttle Columbia", Joint Hearing before the Committee on Science and Technology, U.S. House of Representatives, and Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, U.S. Senate, February 12, 2003

³ John Broder, "Panel Unlikely to End Deepwater Drilling Ban Early," *New York Times*, June 21, 2010

⁴ Seth Borenstein, "Obama Spill Panel Big on Policy, Not Engineering," *Associated Press*, June 20, 2010

conducted by those Commissions was unbiased. I fear that as currently constructed, the Commission will serve little purpose other than rubberstamping your Administration's predetermined policy goals without fully investigating the root causes of the incident. Based on the composition of the Commission, it appears that the real task they are being asked to undertake is to justify the offshore drilling moratorium.

Therefore, I recommend that, to ensure its complete independence, the Commission should report directly to you and to the Congress. Additionally, I would suggest that the membership of the Commission be expanded to include more scientific and technical members in a manner similar to that of the *Challenger* and *Columbia* Commissions, and that you solicit suggestions for new members from key Members of Congress.

I look forward to working with you to ensure that the American public will view the work of the Commission as wholly independent and unbiased.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Broun".

REP. PAUL BROUN, M.D.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Investigations
And Oversight

cc: REP. BRAD MILLER
Chairman
Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight