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**The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**  
**Honorable Congressman Darrell Issa, Chairman**  
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**Making the Gulf Coast Whole Again: Assessing the Recovery  
Efforts of BP and the Obama Administration after the Oil Spill**

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## **A Local Perspective Update on the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill**

As far back as the war of 1812, the tenacious spirit of our community became legendary with the defeat of the British at the Chalmette Battlefield, better known as the Battle of New Orleans. Today, the rebuilding of a physical and emotional infrastructure for a community brought face to face with its very existence represents a resiliency and determination of a people whose commitment to home has become legendary in its own right. In fact, including the BP Oil Spill, we, as a community, possess the distinction of participating in five Type I Incidents over the past 6 years. This has taught us that character of a community is not developed or defined during crisis, it is merely revealed. It is ironic that we face conflict with the British, albeit through BP. As with the subsequent almost 200 years, we again look to a long lasting mutually beneficial partnership with BP. But this is only possible with the balance of need and response to that need.

I believe that philosopher George Santayana is correct in his assertion that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. The history has now been written on the multiple failures which lead to the BP-leased Deepwater Horizon drilling rig explosion on April 20, 2010, killing eleven workers and initiating the worst environmental disaster in U.S. history, with an estimated 5 million barrels of oil leaked into the fishing waters, estuaries, wildlife habitat, and ecosystem of the Gulf Coast. The failures were broken down into multiple findings from technical to managerial. The executive summary of the Chief Counsel to the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling identified the following managerial failures:

1. BP did not fully appreciate the risks
2. BP did not adequately supervise operations
3. BP did not properly train or support their personnel
4. BP did not properly communicate
  - a. BP changed its plans repeatedly and up to the very last minute, sometimes causing confusion and frustration.
  - b. When communication was sent it was often inadequate in detail and guidance.

As a result of these failures, the Gulf Coast and the nation were forced to embark on oil spill response activities of monumental proportions. In St. Bernard Parish alone, over 1300 personnel, many of whom were previously commercial fisherman, became trained Hazmat Technicians and participated in the development and implementation of response and recovery operations conducted within our boundaries, marshes and barrier islands. A Branch Unified Command was established with the Coast Guard, British Petroleum and St. Bernard Parish in which all plans and operations were reviewed and submitted for approval to the Incident Command at Houma. This Unified Command and structure was acknowledged both by BP and the Coast Guard as a model Branch and remained operational until the closing of the Branch in December 2010.

After nearly 5 Million barrels of spilled oil entered the Gulf and resulted in hundreds of miles of impacted and "disappearing" coastline, tainted fishing waters, debilitated wildlife, and closed beaches, no clear direction to a comprehensive resolution emerged. Additionally, even interventions designed to assist have become destined to destroy. Case in point: thousands of anchors placed as part of the boom blitz to contain the oil, have been abandoned and left to wreak further havoc upon our boaters, marshes, and nesting grounds and are poised to resurface

during hurricane season. On a personal level, our residents continue to face countless lost jobs and revenue, a declining seafood market and an unknown number of unpaid claims for damages and response costs associated with this disaster. In the face of the opportunity to act on over a year's worth of review and evaluation, what will the historians memorialize about the measures taken to ensure the managerial failures which led to the greatest man-made environmental disaster to occur in American History were not repeated during the response or restoration?

If Katrina should have taught us any lesson, it is that the regulations, statutes and laws that govern our response and recovery activities are written to process the typical, not the catastrophic disaster. The Stafford Act was never written to be able to respond to the requirements of a Katrina. The Oil Spill Response Act was not written to respond for a Deepwater Horizon. As a result, the processes followed by the responsible party during a typical release, as well as the oversight provided by the United States Coast Guard were insufficient to ensure the integrity of a mission of this magnitude and importance.

As I experienced the response activities from the position as a member of the Incident Command for the Hopedale Branch, my assessment of the managerial effectiveness of the Responsible Party does not deviate from the previously aforementioned assessment.

### ***BP Did Not Fully Appreciate the Risk***

Whether BP fully appreciated the risk associated with the spill can only be evaluated and measured by the effectiveness of their response, or lack thereof. As a community, St. Bernard Parish understood the effects of oil impacting our marsh; the dying coastline, the dead oysters, the missing shrimp and shrimp market, the depressed families, the physical illnesses, all of these were real and all of these continued while a world waited for the leak to stop. All of these continue today. We knew the risks of accepting Sediment Treatment Recommendations that would limit recovery activities to natural attenuation, as the effects of manual removal would create even more damage to the delicate ecosystem of the marsh. For Louisiana, the only viable course of action to protect the marsh was to prevent the oil from reaching our interior coast. Debates about berms and boom, skimmers and schedules, and pollution and policy all took precedent over decisive and consistent action. And when a decision was made, the ability to execute that decision presented another series of delay. An illustration of this included the procurement of containment boom to fill the operational requirements to cut off the flow of oil into the interior coastal areas of St. Bernard Parish. Once a decision to lay boom was made which involved breaking through secret and separate meetings of BP personnel, the acquisition of the boom became yet another story. BP communicated to all Branches that they had canvassed the entire globe and had secured all available sources of boom and that we needed to only be patient and await our supply. Using lessons learned and spurred on by encroaching oil mass, the St. Bernard Branch conducted an independent search for containment boom and located a source outside the established BP Logistics chain. After BP rejected the concept of such a resource based on concerns that the source may not meet their high standard of quality or that the containment boom might be defective or used, an examination of the boom was completed by both BP and the Coast Guard, St. Bernard Branch was authorized to procure the containment boom for operational commitments. The Branch procured enough boom that we were able to advance it to other branches within the region as requested to maintain their operational commitments as well. BP even negotiated the purchase directly and then issued a

directive that only BP could secure boom for future operations. Equally telling of what appears to be a lack of concern for the risk was the approach used to obtain and deliver appropriate storage tanks and skimmer equipment in a timely manner. Suffice it to say, had the initial forecasts for inundation by oil been accurate or had any of the potential tropical activity actually materialized to the Louisiana coast, there would have been insufficient resources to conduct the necessary logistical support or maintain operations. If the risk associated with the impact was truly understood, the necessary equipment required to respond would have been pre-staged on site. There is no doubt that hindsight offers great ability to second guess any disaster response, but these patterns of disregard or an inability to assess the risks only serve to cast greater doubt about the motives of BP or the insufficient authority in the current legislation to hold the responsible party responsible for not only the disaster but the response as well. The logical conclusion in understanding this pattern leads to the belief that the costs associated with prevention and response, if delayed or denied, would provide relief with respect to restoration. Regardless, to have the responsible party so intrinsically entrenched within the logistical and planning aspect of the response so as to be able to control the operational tempo via financial veto authority can be mistaken, or revealed, as a failure to appreciate the risk. Passive or bureaucratic resistance to fund operational requirements can often be mistaken for failure to fully appreciate a risk.

### ***BP Did Not Adequately Supervise Operations***

The effects of inadequate supervision of operations led to numerous operational concerns. The term inadequate in this scenario is easily synonymous with uncoordinated. While the presence of BP at the local level was clearly evident, the coordination of the role, authority, and mission of the local BP representation in regard to being consistent with the Houma management or beyond was clearly non-existent. Whether by design or ineptitude, the lack of coordination within the BP structure from one branch to another and from BP executives to the branch management served to delay the delivery of assistance, bifurcate the response mission, and paralyze the role of the US Coast Guard as an authority to oversee needed operational decisions.

Consistently, local BP representation was cautioned about "going native" and this concern began to bleed into the US Coast Guard. "Going native" was discovered to mean that the responsible party representative or the assigned US Coast Guard representation lost their respective ability to tow the BP line and that the wishes, desires, and requests from a local community were being attended to without proper objectivity in relation to the unstated boundaries. The most obvious of this situation was when BP representatives who had 10 million dollar signature authority in non-spill roles were reduced to no signature authority at the Hopedale Branch. Supervision within the scope of the branch regularly resulted in productive partnerships with a focus on the mission at hand but that often met with resistance from outside the branch. However, the longer the response activities continued, the more the local BP representation was stripped of any ability to contribute to a decision making process and in turn, the less defined the local US Coast Guard representation's role became. Eventually, the process of US Coast Guard intervention became shifted to assert its "authority" to protect the integrity of the operations of the spill response. Again, this undefined and inconsistent dynamic of who was being protected and who was in authority resulted in, at the least, an ineffective response tempo and, at most, additional damage to the Louisiana coast, its wildlife, and its fisheries. Inadequate and uncoordinated supervision added to the current poor planning and performance during this incident.

### ***BP Did Not Properly Train or Support Their Personnel***

During the period prior to final "Top Kill" BP provided at least 6 Branch Commanders that "rotated" into the command structure. Several brought on from retirement. None had experience with oil spill response or Incident Command. Most underwent National Incident Management Training during their limited tenure. Two were removed quickly for "going native". Despite having multiple commanders, operations personnel and logistics staff, BP failed to provide the necessary financial staff to properly procure the assets and equipment utilized to respond to the incident despite numerous pleas and promises to do so.

During the first week of the release, BP requested that all requests for support be logged into the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness for processing. This was modified after the flow of requests became overwhelming to manage in this manner. The branches and Parishes were then instructed by BP to provide the request directly to the BP Branch Commander on the ground for authorization. When this proved unsustainable, written instructions regarding the limits of authority for each BP position within the command structure were implemented. These instructions were then further modified and eventually rescinded, following additional written guidance, contrary to the previous agreements. Despite numerous pleas to BP to provide the necessary staff and training to uphold their fiduciary and operational responsibilities, at one point the BP Branch Commanders were instructed to NOT SIGN ANYTHING with respect to operations or finances as it related to the spill. We consulted with the Coast Guard who informed us that they could not engage BP with respect to their financial obligations, their responsibility rested at directing operations and not payments. In short, the failure to pay contractors, property owners, and suppliers was a result of a failure to provide the necessary training and support to understand the Incident Command Structure and process in order to facilitate effective operations.

The lack of appropriate training and personnel was further underscored as the disaster response continued past the initial three months where the duty assignments called for untrained USCG personnel to fill billets that local experts were more qualified to fill but not supported as a matter of conflict created by BP. More specifically, Coastal Environments, Inc. was a company with 40 plus years of experience in coastal management and restoration. This company was originally brought on to assist in the early development of strategies and assessment, coordinated with local BP representatives, then they were subsequently hired by BP directly to continue to provide the same service that they have been denied payment for during their early and approved involvement. The history of CEI goes back to the initial days immediately following the response. After all, Dr. Gagliano is a renowned expert in the field of marsh restoration and has over 40 years of experience operating within our marsh area. In fact, he has provided guidance to St. Bernard Parish and the state of Louisiana long enough to see what has worked and what has ruined our fragile ecosystem- what restores and what wastes time, money, and energy. It was important to us that we engaged an expert who could not only advise us as to the topography, tidal activity, current and depth of water and passages, but more importantly, someone who could guide our actions to ensure we didn't create more harm as a result of our response. Although initially approved, BP logistics requested that the Parish utilize its advance payment to cover these costs. During a meeting with BP the Parish acknowledged that the advance payment was to be utilized for administrative costs and requested that BP pay for these expenses through the operational channels. BP then requested that we sign and submit a "213" requisition form for approval to authorize payments. As recently as the week of May 25, 2011 we received correspondence that indicated the Parish Director of Homeland Security did not

possess the authority to sign a 213 requisition, provided to him by BP for signature, and therefore the invoice was being denied for payment. The fact that a 213 requisition form had been submitted to Houma and after 6 months was not denied, rejected and returned was not surprising. The fact that these individuals met with Coast Guard and BP personnel everyday at the numerous staff and planning meetings without any indication that the services being rendered were not authorized also is not surprising. After all, the BP Branch Finance Section Chief acknowledged in the after action report submitted to BP Incident Command in Houma following the first 100 days of operation that he had yet to receive a single authorization to any of the 213's he had submitted to date with respect to these items. Clearly, the lack of support, understanding of operational tempo and commitments of the command has led to BP's lack of managerial awareness. After all, who denies payment to a renowned expert for services rendered while they are still performing such support directly without discussion with the vendor. BP had no knowledge that CEI was still working for them and CEI had no knowledge that BP had denied their request for payment.

### ***BP Did Not Properly Communicate***

BP's communication changed repeatedly causing confusion and frustration and was inadequate in detail and guidance. The rotation of BP personnel occurred with a lack of clear communication of who would be stepping in, for how long, and if there would be a return of the exiting personnel remained a mystery. The rotation of the USCG personnel at least had a mission assignment date of duty and release. Throughout the operational period, the mode of operation included segregated discussions, some within a BP circle, some within a BP/USCG circle, and some, albeit limited, within a Branch command circle. It was common that communications within the BP/USCG circle took place without proper notice to the local command and the information that was shared was often veiled and non-committal. If an attempt was made to further address a lack of information and communication was attempted at a higher branch command, the vagueness of information just intensified.

Even in the sense of a proper logistical plan being implemented, communication of resources, activities, testing results, anticipated outcomes, or proposed interventions were systematically left out of communication notices to the local level. This common occurrence typically involved vessels or other resources travelling into St. Bernard waters and operational areas with no advance notice or coordination. The communication breakdown was daily in the sense that daily operational plans were required to be forwarded to Houma, the BP Headquarters, only to be placed in a cyber hole that never produced a response to the operational plan submitted or the request for appropriate assets to support the plan embedded within it.

Poor communication disrupted even the most basic needs of the response. In an effort to keep information sharing to a minimum, often times, and information was lost in communication from one level of management to another.

Our community will shortly cross the threshold where our Branch of operations has now been closed as long as it was open. We still have landowners who have yet to be paid, Marinas waiting to receive payments for boat launches that occurred 6 months earlier, Fishermen whose boats were damaged waiting reimbursement while unable to return to commercial fishing without an operational boat, only resulting in further damages and lost income. Vendors awaiting payment and last week we received our first notification that BP is now denying payment to vendors utilized in the response.

Here is yet another example of training and support. During the initial days of the response, BP's contractors trained our commercial fisherman on the techniques of properly positioning boom in the water to collect the weathered oil. Our fisherman explained that the technique of tying the anchor to the boom without chain would be self defeating and would result in lost anchors. We requested chain and modifications to the installation process. BP never produced the chain. As a result, 35000 anchors are now resting on the bottom of our marsh, waiting for the next tropical storm to have them rip through our unprotected marsh. Unlike other branches, we ensured that Global positioning to mark the location of each anchor placed in the water was utilized. At the completion of the response we requested that BP remove what they ultimately were responsible for placing in our marsh. To date they have spent more time and energy validating that the anchors pose no threat then time spent removing them. Yet last week, my office received still more calls from fishermen who have stated that their nets, and propellers have been ripped or damaged as a result of their contact with these anchors.

What has changed? The same lack of supervision and clear guidance that created the catastrophic spill has plagued and racked the response. BP's ability for passive resistance and delay and defer have been more the motto of the response then their promise to make it right.

So where do we go from here. The final stage of any catastrophe is restoration and recovery. The first step of the recovery must be to make it right with those whose lives have been impacted by this catastrophic event. In short, Mr. Feinberg's process of paying claims has become wracked with as much dysfunction, inequity and failures as the response. Of the over 4100 active claims that have been filed in St. Bernard Parish, one of the most impacted parish's with respect to contamination from oil and near ground zero with respect to its effects on our economy and markets, only 1800 have been addressed in some fashion. According to the paperwork provided by the Gulf Coast Claims Office, they have handled approx 150 cases in the last 4 weeks. At this rate, the Gulf Coast Claims Office should be able to resolve all interim payments within the next 2 years. Understand that interim payments are those payments necessary for an impacted family to survive until final settlement can be reached.

This is where my community stands after reaching out to BP and offering our boats and our services to help protect the very life of our community that their failures created. To be balanced, BP certainly has forwarded funding for some response activities and interventions for the seafood industry and tourism. It has been stated throughout this incident that what BP has done well, they have done very well but what they have done poorly, they have done very poorly.

As I look to restoration, my only hope is that the Natural Restoration and Damage Assessment process will be the phase of this disaster where as a nation we awake and say no more. It is time for the trustees to step up and tell BP that the only assistance and support required is for them to deposit the resources necessary to cover the costs associated with the recovery. The recently and

highly publicized agreement of a 1 Billion dollar down payment to the five coastal states for early restoration activities seems to be following the same path as the preceding "agreements". Announce a plan and then figure out how to make the plan fit the hype that was part of the press release that celebrated it. To date, there is still no signed agreement for the use of the 1 Billion dollars, still no clear delineation of projects that will be approved, and still no sense of urgency to support the claims necessary to salvage an entire industry. In fact, the only clarity about the early restoration dollars is that BP maintains when or if it ever gets released outside of a court order.

Honorable Members of Congress, there is an undeniable pattern of one sided gesturing and posturing over this Oil Spill. We seem to lose the fact that this incident dwarfed other similar incidents in our history as a world, but we seem to point to and celebrate the advertising snippets and sound bites from the evening news hours. While there is certainly a balance, this process is far from level. As long as the current legislation is allowed to exist and responsible parties are given the role of ultimate authority in response and recovery decisions with little potential for negative consequence, the outcome for disasters of this magnitude will likely not be very different.

Hold the responsible party accountable.

Remove response and restoration authority from the responsible party.

Legislate for the disaster that will happen verses the one that happened last.

Localize the resolution process to better serve the impacted victims.

Establish a response forum of oil spill experts that evaluates and estimates legitimate response funding, resource supply, disaster magnitude, the organizational structure of state and local oil spill response teams, and compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal regulations for the disaster response.

Thank you for your continued diligence in addressing the issues that our energy industry must get right. Let's hope that if and when BP Makes It Right, that the industry will also get it right so that production and safety do not have to be mutually exclusive and oil spill disasters are responded to based on environmental protection and not accounting spreadsheets.

Respectfully,  
Craig P. Taffaro, Jr.  
Parish President  
St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana



As an illustration of what the reality is of the impact of this ongoing disaster, I would like to share a few stories with you.

Marty Melerine Jr. is an oyster fisherman out of Hopedale, LA. Mr. Melerine's family settled in St. Bernard Parish in 1778, coming from the Canary Islands as fishermen. His family has been in St. Bernard fishing ever since.

"I started when I was little kid, I was six years old. My daddy brought us on the boat. It was part of life. I brought my kids on the boat when they were four. You take your kids to park; we take them on the boat.

"I started really making money trawling when I was a teenager. When I was in high school I had vehicles paid for, cash. After Katrina we had just about recovered, now we're spending our life savings on crushed concrete to rebuild our reefs that the oil spill destroyed. Our reefs are getting covered up with silt because we haven't been able to work them. We have to get that off and then put the crushed concrete to rebuild. Everything we've worked for is going into this. If this doesn't work we're done. Try to sleep at night if you think about it that way.

"If we don't do this what do we do? We can't do anything else. Even if we can, we don't want to. BP is offering final settlements to us that we could earn in a month at the right time of the year. We make most of our money in a 3 month period, the rest of the time we're planting and working on boats. It's a seasonal business. BP is trying to lowball and stall so we settle. Fishermen are settling for peanuts. The settlements that BP is offering we can't even rebuild our businesses with.

"We're not going to let this keep us down. We're not sitting on our hands asking for a handout. We're asking them to make us whole again. I've been working more now than I was when I was fishing, trying to rebuild my business. Everybody is trying to rebuild their life, and we don't have a lot of faith in the Feinberg camp. Bona fide Louisiana fishermen who work hard and pay their taxes are the ones being hit hardest. We may not have a college degree but we can do whatever we want with our hands. We're going to make it and we're going to survive this."

Meet George Barisich, a Lifetime St. Bernard Parish Fishermen and  
President of the United Commercial Fishermen's Association

"In the 1930s my grandfathers on both sides came from Croatia. They settled in New Orleans in a fishing village. My grandfather George Vujinovich is one of the founding fathers of our oyster industry. I had the fishing blood from both sides. My daddy came from Croatia when he was 11 and my mom came from Croatia when she was 9.

"My daddy loved shrimping and grew up on the boat with his daddy. When he was 12, his daddy went back to Croatia and left him on a boat with a bunch of men. My daddy was a good fisherman, so in 1948 he bought his own boat. He did so well he had the "FJG" built, named after his first three children.

"Every summer, starting when I was 9, I went on the boat. I didn't go to summer camp I went on the boat. I excelled in school so I went to college and I got a degree in Social Welfare and one in Psychology. I went to law school at Loyola for a year and a half. I didn't like it though, and I

went back to shrimping when I was 22. So 9 or 10 months out the year I fished, and the other couple of months I hunted and played.

“In the early 70’s we had no government support and my daddy was dying. He told me I could’ve had an easy life, he was always upset I didn’t finish law school. I promised him before he died that I would use everything I learned in school to preserve what the government was trying to kill, and that’s what I’ve been doing ever since. In 1993 I started the United Commercial Fishermen’s Association.

“The shrimping industry started to change because of imports. I became more diversified and started oyster farming. Before Katrina I was barely hanging on, and after Katrina I was in survival mode. Those of us who stayed with it came back, but it was incremental. Then the oil spill hit.

“I’ve had no oyster production for over a year, and I lost half the shrimp season. Once the areas were open I was still crippled because the dockside shrimp prices were 50% less than pre-spill. I’m still out of business with my oysters, which is further complicated due to the oyster spat is not catching.

“I’m still waiting for my interim payment from BP. I haven’t received a determination letter. From the fishermen that I’ve been talking with, some of them have been getting \$25,000 final offers when they were making \$25,000 a week before the oil spill.

“Those of us that hang on in the shrimp industry are going to survive if it stays as it is now, only a few people shrimping. We could survive at this price. But we’re not in this business to survive, we like to put money away and make money. We’re also not going to have a rebound until we get consumer confidence back again and nobody can predict that. As far as oysters go, the jury is still out on how long that is going to take. Those of us who are “lifers”, the consensus is to hang on as long as we can.”

## **CRAIG P. TAFFARO, JR.** **St. Bernard Parish President**



Craig P. Taffaro, Jr., a lifelong resident of St. Bernard, has served as St. Bernard Parish President since January 2008. He also served as District D Parish Councilman in 1996-2000 and 2004-2008. During his tenure as Parish President, St. Bernard Parish Government – in April of 2011 – surpassed the \$1 billion mark in recovery dollars obligated by FEMA – the first Gulf Coast community to reach the milestone due to the cooperation and proper management of projects. According to FEMA, no applicant in the other Gulf Coast States – Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, or Texas – has exceeded \$1 billion since Hurricane Katrina. That includes more than 50 miles of streets, 10 new fire stations, four new gyms, parks, public buildings, drainage stations, 92 rehabilitated sewer lift stations, and levee protection. One cannot go more than a few blocks without seeing a recovery project under construction.

In 2010, President Taffaro established the St. Bernard Parish Incident Command Post in response to the largest offshore oil spill resulting from the explosion at the MC252 Oil Platform. As a Certified Incident Commander to the Unified Hopedale Branch, he supervised the operations in 10 divisions with over 2,500 first responders in over 650 vessels that deployed over 600,000 linear feet of boom to protect over 2,000 square miles of sensitive marsh land. President Taffaro utilized the largest and most effectively employed network of more than 1,300 commercial fishermen to form a well trained fleet of certified oil spill responders. Additionally, he was a strong voice among regional leaders addressing the BP oil spill in efforts to protect and to restore critical fisheries and marshlands and get appropriate funding and support from BP and the government.

He has been an invited guest speaker at several national conferences, including the National Hurricane Conference and the National Committee on Levee Safety, on his leadership role in the emergency response efforts of Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Gustav and the BP Oil Spill that also involved simultaneous hurricane response efforts. Since 2005, St. Bernard Parish has experienced five Type I disasters.

President Taffaro chairs the St. Bernard Parish Building Mitigation Committee and the St. Bernard Housing, Quality of Life, and Redevelopment Commission. He chairs the St. Bernard Parish Home Mortgage Authority and on the St. Bernard Parish Library Board of Control. He has served as Treasurer and currently is Second Vice President of the Regional Planning Commission for the New Orleans Region. President Taffaro was chosen as the 2010 St. Bernard Business and Professional Women's Club Man of the Year and honored by the Alliance for Good Government as a Legislator of the Year in 2007.

When he was a councilman in 2005, he played a critical response role during Hurricane Katrina, the largest natural disaster in American history that brought catastrophic flooding and resulted in the largest residential oil spill in American history in St. Bernard Parish. In the immediate aftermath, he helped with rescue efforts, led daily logistical briefings that oversaw efforts to remove health and safety hazards, and he assisted residents with temporary living arrangements.

President Taffaro, who lives in Meraux, has been married to Debbie Curry for the last 25 years. They have eight children. He spent over 20 years as a Licensed Professional Counselor and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. He also held a Faculty Appointment in Psychology at Nunez Community College, was the Founder of Straight Street Group Home and Non-Profit Counseling Organization and he helped establish and served as the Treatment Director of St. Bernard Parish Drug Court Programs. Taffaro also served as Assistant Principal at Archbishop Hannan High School in Meraux, where he established a peer counseling program and was an Assistant Coach for the District Championship Season in Football and was Head Coach and Coach of the Year for Track and State Runner-up in Cross Country. President Taffaro graduated from Holy Cross High School, earned a Bachelor's Degree from University of Southwestern Louisiana and a Master's Degree in Counseling Psychology from the University of Southern Mississippi. He has completed several Ironman Triathlons and a dozen marathons.

President Taffaro is a member and Extraordinary Minister of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Violet. He is a member of the Kiwanis Club, Jumonville Plantation Homeowners Association, St. Bernard Chamber of Commerce, Board of Directors St. Bernard Battered Women's Shelter, United Commercial Fisherman Association, ULL Alumni and USM Alumni Associations, Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity, LCA, Chalmette Track Club, Founding Member of the St. Bernard Recreation Corp. and an active Recreation Department Coach. Taffaro has assisted in establishing several community events designed to rebuild the social network in St. Bernard, including the Always Home Dance, the Chalmette Track Club Neighborhood Run Series, the Employee Wellness Program, and the Mental Health Consortium for St. Bernard during Hurricane Katrina Emergency Response.