

Wednesday, January 26, 2011

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico's Third District spoke today during a Natural Resources Committee hearing on the final report from the President's National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling. Below are his remarks.

"Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I know this important hearing is going to outline the recommendations to prevent another Deep Water Horizon disaster from happening again, which is why we are here. It's not to debate whether one supports or opposes offshore drilling. It's to make sure we don't let this happen again and that we all understand the roles we have to play to get there. I want to thank the Commission for the work that they did because this is a tough job and you had a tough set of circumstances and many critics – including many of us. I hope we truly listen closely to your recommendations and that we see what we can do to find common ground to be able to get to that point.

"By the time this Committee had convened last year to hear testimony from BP executives, it had already become clear that what led to the Deepwater Horizon explosion was the culmination of systemic failures. It was the failure of companies who knowingly refused to implement the necessary safeguards to prevent this disaster, and it was a failure of governmental policies and regulators that did not apply the proper oversight to minimize the risk of disaster.

"BP had shown itself to be negligent in safety violations and environmental protection. We should not forget what happened in 2005 with the explosion in Texas and the lives that were lost – 15 people – and 200,000 gallons of crude oil in a pipeline that ruptured in Northern Alaska.

"But what is most significant about the Commission's report is that it reveals that the culture of undermining safety standards is not just an issue for BP, but an epidemic facing the entire off-shore drilling industry. Quoting directly from the report: 'The blowout was not the product of decisions made by a rogue industry or government officials... rather, the root causes are systemic, and absent significant reform in both industry practices and government policies,

might well reoccur.'

"The bipartisan Commission's report only confirms that Congress must take action – do our part – to prevent disasters like this from happening again. During the 111th Congress, this Committee put in a lot of work to develop safeguards that would modernize safety and environmental protections for the federal offshore leasing program in the CLEAR Act. Many expressed an interest to see the report before moving forward. We now have that report.

"As we hear from witnesses of the bipartisan Commission today, we have to ask ourselves: 'What are we going to do? What is our role as Congress to make sure this never happens again? Are we going to sit back and allow a failed system to continue?' We cannot turn a blind eye to this issue. The Commission's report clearly outlines that Congress needs to act quickly to protect the safety of people, the welfare and livelihoods of communities, and the habitat of fragile wildlife.

"Only seven months ago we saw the horrific images of the explosion that killed workers, the plumes of oil that devastated marine life, local seafood industries, vulnerable wetlands, and the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Over 205 million gallons of oil were spilled in the Gulf because of the Deepwater Horizon spill. Let us never forget the people who were impacted and the families who lost loved ones. It's in everyone's best interest, including industry, to not let this happen again, and to truly understand the responsibility that we all share to prevent just that."

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