

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 4, 2010

The Honorable Robert Graham
National Commission on the BP Deepwater
Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling
One Thomas Circle, 4th Floor
Washington, DC 20005

The Honorable William Reilly
National Commission on the BP Deepwater
Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling
One Thomas Circle, 4th Floor
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Chairman Graham and Chairman Reilly,

We were pleased to see that one of your recent hearings focused on the inadequacy of the spill response to the Deepwater Horizon incident. Among other things, it is painfully clear that our oil spill response plans are inadequate for large, open ocean spills which may result from drilling operations. We write to express our support for including Offshore Supply Vessels (OSVs) in immediate response plans to such oil spills.

OSVs are uniquely suited to assist with oil spill response. First, their proximity to any potential oil spill and the sheer number of vessels on location would allow for near-immediate response to a spill in order to contain it at its source. Conversely, the current oil spill response plan relies on vessels being dispersed along our entire coastline, a time-consuming process that results in the spread of a spill beyond anything that could reasonably be contained. Secondly, OSVs are large vessels able to operate in a variety of conditions, including at night and in rough seas. An oil spill certainly will not pause for unfavorable conditions, so it is unwise to expect the same of our response vessels. Finally, industry officials have indicated that the existing fleet of OSVs can, within a 60- to 90- day period, be retrofitted to combine enhanced spill response capability with their traditional mission of platform support.

Unfortunately, U.S. Coast Guard policy limits the size of the oil spill response fleet, preventing the implementation of these commonsense solutions. We strongly support the elimination of this arbitrary limit and the authorization of a larger, more appropriately designed class of oil spill response vessels. We have communicated these sentiments to both the U.S. Coast Guard and the Department of Interior. It is our judgment that these two agencies have the administrative ability to authorize and require a larger, more appropriately designed class of oil spill response vessels.

As you finalize your recommendations to the President we urge you to include proposals to modernize our spill response regime to include OSVs. This proposal mirrors requirements for spill response which the oil industry already meets in the North Sea and offshore Brazil. Surely the United States, which pioneered so much of this technology being deployed worldwide, can rise to the same level of spill response required elsewhere.

Thank you for your service on this commission and your consideration of this recommendation.

Sincerely,



Mary Landrieu
United States Senator



David Vitter
United States Senator



Mark Begich
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

cc: Richard Lazarus, Executive Director