

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 21, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

RE: Urgent Data Collection Needs Related to Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Plume

Dear President Obama:

We write to urge your Administration's immediate action to authorize and initiate investigative efforts that will better quantify the amount, distribution, and nature of oil that is moving below the surface in the Gulf of Mexico. As you know, there is a significant surface oil slick in the Gulf of Mexico, but we believe that the larger threat may be from oil suspended in the water column below the ocean's surface, especially to the fragile ecosystems along the Florida coastlines. Much of our tourism economy depends on swift action to identify and ameliorate this threat.

This past Wednesday, May 19th, the Members of the Florida Delegation met to hear testimony from Rear Admiral Paul Zukunft, the Director of Response Policy with the United States Coast Guard. Through his testimony and the ensuing dialogue, our concerns only deepened about the scope and movement of oil into the strong Gulf of Mexico loop currents. It is clear that oil is moving into these strong loop currents and could bring oil to our coastlines within a few days. What is much less clear is how much subsurface oil is heading towards our shores. This is critical information to allow local responders prepare for the unfolding crisis. Surface oil floats. You can see, it, track it, and plan for appropriate mitigation with booms and dispersants. Unfortunately, it is much harder to observe subsurface oil. We do not know the dimensions, nature or movement of the threat.

We also learned that your Science Advisor, John Holdren, and other Administration science staff met Wednesday with a large group of expert scientists from the premier oceanographic institutes, universities, and research organizations. It is our understanding that the meeting included a lengthy discussion regarding research projects that could be implemented to better understand the threat, gather required data, characterize the spill, and monitor the movement of the oil in the Loop and Gulf. We urge you to take the best ideas from these brilliant scientific minds and put them into actions as soon as humanly possible.

Many Members of the Florida Delegation have been meeting separately with our regional oceanographic experts and we know they have much to offer in the way of assistance to the federal, state, and local response efforts. We are fortunate to have some of the best researchers participating in the Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association (SECOORA). SECORRA is one of 11 Regional Associations that receive funding from NOAA as part of the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). Its membership includes virtually all of the

oceanographic institutes and important ocean industries in the four state regions (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina).

Through our meetings, we have learned that it is the consensus among SECOORA scientists that we must quickly gather more information regarding the amount, distribution, and nature of the oil that is below the surface. This oil poses a potential considerable, unmeasured and unknown threat. If there is in fact substantial undetected subsurface oil moving through the loop current, it could upwell and cause more serious damage to coastal ecosystems, coral reefs, mangroves, seagrasses, and their inhabitants (including, marine mammals and commercial fisheries) than surface oil. In addition, subsurface oil could be causing undetected damage to deep water resources including spawning fish, larvae, deep coral reefs, and benthic environments. There is also a need to understand the subsurface oil mass in order to accurately assess the true damage resulting from the spill.

As you know, many millions of Floridians and other Gulf Coast residents depend on these resources for their livelihoods. Florida has the most densely populated coastline in the United States, and this spill threatens the beaches on which people live, on which our hospitality and tourism industry depends, and on which our commercial and recreational boating, fishing and diving industries depend. Florida is home to 84% of the nation's coral reef ecosystems which are directly impinged by the loop current. A NOAA study conducted in 2000 concluded that coral reef ecosystems alone contribute over \$7 billion in direct annual economic activity and 71,000 jobs to Florida's economy. The multiples of this threat to fisheries, tourism, and other ocean related economic activities are many times this number.

SECOORA scientists believe that the highest research priority should be to characterize the nature of the subsurface threat, monitor its movement, determine the effects of dispersants being applied underwater at the wellhead, and determine if there are any effective measures that could be taken before it approaches our Florida and east coast ecosystems. The Members of the Florida Delegation agree with their assessment.

Again, we urge you to work to immediately implement the best ideas and proposals to collect the data we need to properly understand the threat posed by the subsurface oil spill. We look forward to working with you in any way we can to achieve this goal.

Sincerely,



Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



Sen. George LeMieux
Member of Congress



Sen. Bill Nelson
Member of Congress



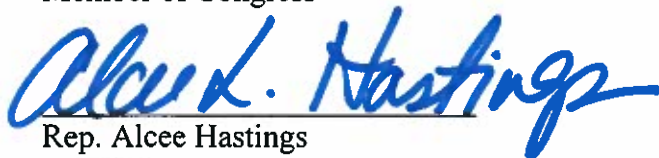
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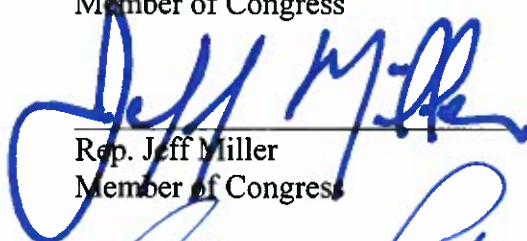
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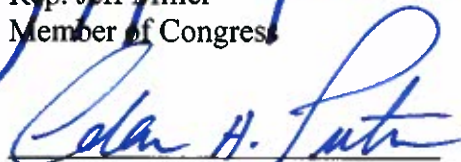
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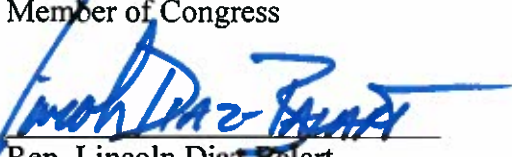
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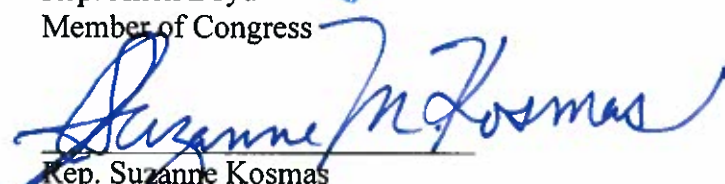
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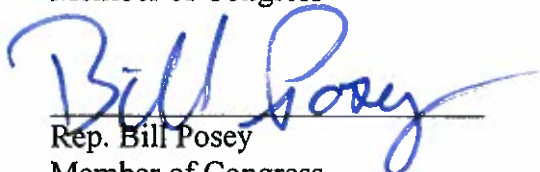
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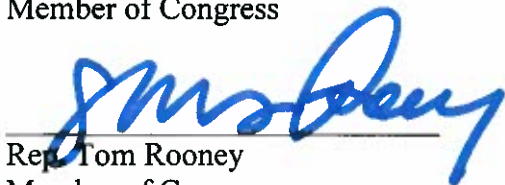
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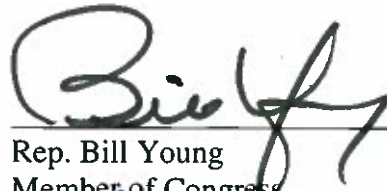
Rep. Ron Klein
Member of Congress

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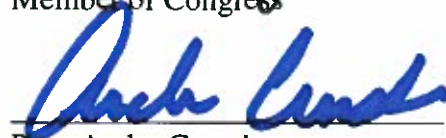

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Member of Congress



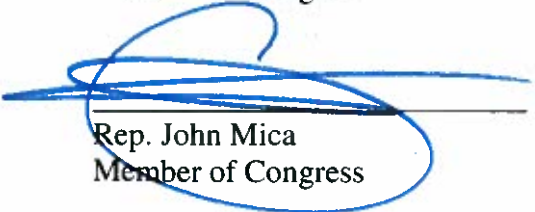
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