

President Obama on the BP Oil Spill

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1 THE PRESIDENT: Good evening. As we speak, our
2 nation faces a multitude of challenges. At home,
3 our top priority is to recover and rebuild from a
4 recession that has touched the lives of nearly
5 every American. Abroad, our brave men and women
6 in uniform are taking the fight to al Qaeda
7 wherever it exists. And tonight, I've returned
8 from a trip to the Gulf Coast to speak with you
9 about the battle we're waging against an oil spill
10 that is assaulting our shores and our citizens.

11 On April 20th, an explosion ripped through BP
12 Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, about 40 miles off
13 the coast of Louisiana. Eleven workers lost their
14 lives. Seventeen others were injured. And soon,
15 nearly a mile beneath the surface of the ocean,
16 oil began spewing into the water.

17 Because there has never been a leak this size
18 at this depth, stopping it has tested the limits
19 of human technology. That's why just after the
20 rig sank, I assembled a team of our nation's best
21 scientists and engineers to tackle this challenge
22 -- a team led by Dr. Steven Chu, a Nobel
23 Prize-winning physicist and our nation's Secretary
24 of Energy. Scientists at our national labs and
25 experts from academia and other oil companies have

1 also provided ideas and advice.

2 As a result of these efforts, we've directed BP
3 to mobilize additional equipment and technology.
4 And in the coming weeks and days, these efforts
5 should capture up to 90 percent of the oil leaking
6 out of the well. This is until the company
7 finishes drilling a relief well later in the
8 summer that's expected to stop the leak
9 completely.

10 Already, this oil spill is the worst
11 environmental disaster America has ever faced.
12 And unlike an earthquake or a hurricane, it's not
13 a single event that does its damage in a matter of
14 minutes or days. The millions of gallons of oil
15 that have spilled into the Gulf of Mexico are more
16 like an epidemic, one that we will be fighting for
17 months and even years.

18 But make no mistake: We will fight this spill
19 with everything we've got for as long as it takes.
20 We will make BP pay for the damage their company
21 has caused. And we will do whatever's necessary
22 to help the Gulf Coast and its people recover from
23 this tragedy.

24 Tonight I'd like to lay out for you what our
25 battle plan is going forward: What we're doing to

1 clean up the oil, what we're doing to help our
2 neighbors in the Gulf, and what we're doing to
3 make sure that a catastrophe like this never
4 happens again.

5 First, the cleanup. From the very beginning of
6 this crisis, the federal government has been in
7 charge of the largest environmental cleanup effort
8 in our nation's history -- an effort led by
9 Admiral Thad Allen, who has almost 40 years of
10 experience responding to disasters. We now have
11 nearly 30,000 personnel who are working across
12 four states to contain and clean up the oil.
13 Thousands of ships and other vessels are
14 responding in the Gulf. And I've authorized the
15 deployment of over 17,000 National Guard members
16 along the coast. These servicemen and women are
17 ready to help stop the oil from coming ashore,
18 they're ready to help clean the beaches, train
19 response workers, or even help with processing
20 claims -- and I urge the governors in the affected
21 states to activate these troops as soon as
22 possible.

23 Because of our efforts, millions of gallons of
24 oil have already been removed from the water
25 through burning, skimming and other collection

1 methods. Over five and a half million feet of
2 boom has been laid across the water to block and
3 absorb the approaching oil. We've approved the
4 construction of new barrier islands in Louisiana
5 to try to stop the oil before it reaches the
6 shore, and we're working with Alabama, Mississippi
7 and Florida to implement creative approaches to
8 their unique coastlines.

9 As the cleanup continues, we will offer
10 whatever additional resources and assistance our
11 coastal states may need. Now, a mobilization of
12 this speed and magnitude will never be perfect,
13 and new challenges will always arise. I saw and
14 heard evidence of that during this trip. So if
15 something isn't working, we want to hear about it.
16 If there are problems in the operation, we will
17 fix them.

18 But we have to recognize that despite our best
19 efforts, oil has already caused damage to our
20 coastline and its wildlife. And sadly, no matter
21 how effective our response is, there will be more
22 oil and more damage before this siege is done.
23 That's why the second thing we're focused on is
24 the recovery and restoration of the Gulf Coast.

25 You know, for generations, men and women who

1 call this region home have made their living from
2 the water. That living is now in jeopardy. I've
3 talked to shrimpers and fishermen who don't know
4 how they're going to support their families this
5 year. I've seen empty docks and restaurants with
6 fewer customers -- even in areas where the beaches
7 are not yet affected. I've talked to owners of
8 shops and hotels who wonder when the tourists
9 might start coming back. The sadness and the
10 anger they feel is not just about the money
11 they've lost. It's about a wrenching anxiety that
12 their way of life may be lost.

13 I refuse to let that happen. Tomorrow, I will
14 meet with the chairman of BP and inform him that
15 he is to set aside whatever resources are required
16 to compensate the workers and business owners who
17 have been harmed as a result of his company's
18 recklessness. And this fund will not be
19 controlled by BP. In order to ensure that all
20 legitimate claims are paid out in a fair and
21 timely manner, the account must and will be
22 administered by an independent third party.

23 Beyond compensating the people of the Gulf in
24 the short term, it's also clear we need a
25 long-term plan to restore the unique beauty and

1 bounty of this region. The oil spill represents
2 just the latest blow to a place that's already
3 suffered multiple economic disasters and decades
4 of environmental degradation that has led to
5 disappearing wetlands and habitats. And the
6 region still hasn't recovered from Hurricanes
7 Katrina and Rita. That's why we must make a
8 commitment to the Gulf Coast that goes beyond
9 responding to the crisis of the moment.

10 I make that commitment tonight. Earlier, I
11 asked Ray Mabus, the Secretary of the Navy, who is
12 also a former governor of Mississippi and a son of
13 the Gulf Coast, to develop a long-term Gulf Coast
14 Restoration Plan as soon as possible. The plan
15 will be designed by states, local communities,
16 tribes, fishermen, businesses, conservationists
17 and other Gulf residents. And BP will pay for the
18 impact this spill has had on the region.

19 The third part of our response plan is the
20 steps we're taking to ensure that a disaster like
21 this does not happen again. A few months ago, I
22 approved a proposal to consider new, limited
23 offshore drilling under the assurance that it
24 would be absolutely safe -- that the proper
25 technology would be in place and the necessary

1 precautions would be taken.

2 That obviously was not the case in the
3 Deepwater Horizon rig, and I want to know why.
4 The American people deserve to know why. The
5 families I met with last week who lost their loved
6 ones in the explosion -- these families deserve to
7 know why. And so I've established a National
8 Commission to understand the causes of this
9 disaster and offer recommendations on what
10 additional safety and environmental standards we
11 need to put in place. Already, I've issued a
12 six-month moratorium on deepwater drilling. I
13 know this creates difficulty for the people who
14 work on these rigs, but for the sake of their
15 safety, and for the sake of the entire region, we
16 need to know the facts before we allow deepwater
17 drilling to continue. And while I urge the
18 Commission to complete its work as quickly as
19 possible, I expect them to do that work thoroughly
20 and impartially.

21 One place we've already begun to take action is
22 at the agency in charge of regulating drilling and
23 issuing permits, known as the Minerals Management
24 Service. Over the last decade, this agency has
25 become emblematic of a failed philosophy that

1 views all regulation with hostility -- a
2 philosophy that says corporations should be
3 allowed to play by their own rules and police
4 themselves. At this agency, industry insiders
5 were put in charge of industry oversight. Oil
6 companies showered regulators with gifts and
7 favors, and were essentially allowed to conduct
8 their own safety inspections and write their own
9 regulations.

10 When Ken Salazar became my Secretary of the
11 Interior, one of his very first acts was to clean
12 up the worst of the corruption at this agency.
13 But it's now clear that the problem there ran much
14 deeper, and the pace of reform was just too slow.
15 And so Secretary Salazar and I are bringing in new
16 leadership at the agency -- Michael Bromwich, who
17 was a tough federal prosecutor and Inspector
18 General. And his charge over the next few months
19 is to build an organization that acts as the oil
20 industry's watchdog -- not its partner.

21 So one of the lessons we've learned from this
22 spill is that we need better regulations, better
23 safety standards, and better enforcement when it
24 comes to offshore drilling. But a larger lesson
25 is that no matter how much we improve our

1 regulation of the industry, drilling for oil these
2 days entails greater risk. After all, oil is a
3 finite resource. We consume more than 20 percent
4 of the world's oil, but have less than 2 percent
5 of the world's oil reserves. And that's part of
6 the reason oil companies are drilling a mile
7 beneath the surface of the ocean -- because we're
8 running out of places to drill on land and in
9 shallow water.

10 For decades, we have known the days of cheap
11 and easily accessible oil were numbered. For
12 decades, we've talked and talked about the need to
13 end America's century-long addiction to fossil
14 fuels. And for decades, we have failed to act
15 with the sense of urgency that this challenge
16 requires. Time and again, the path forward has
17 been blocked -- not only by oil industry
18 lobbyists, but also by a lack of political courage
19 and candor.

20 The consequences of our inaction are now in
21 plain sight. Countries like China are investing
22 in clean energy jobs and industries that should be
23 right here in America. Each day, we send nearly
24 \$1 billion of our wealth to foreign countries for
25 their oil. And today, as we look to the Gulf, we

1 see an entire way of life being threatened by a
2 menacing cloud of black crude.

3 We cannot consign our children to this future.
4 The tragedy unfolding on our coast is the most
5 painful and powerful reminder yet that the time to
6 embrace a clean energy future is now. Now is the
7 moment for this generation to embark on a national
8 mission to unleash America's innovation and seize
9 control of our own destiny.

10 This is not some distant vision for America.
11 The transition away from fossil fuels is going to
12 take some time, but over the last year and a half,
13 we've already taken unprecedented action to
14 jumpstart the clean energy industry. As we speak,
15 old factories are reopening to produce wind
16 turbines, people are going back to work installing
17 energy-efficient windows, and small businesses are
18 making solar panels. Consumers are buying more
19 efficient cars and trucks, and families are making
20 their homes more energy-efficient. Scientists and
21 researchers are discovering clean energy
22 technologies that someday will lead to entire new
23 industries.

24 Each of us has a part to play in a new future
25 that will benefit all of us. As we recover from

1 this recession, the transition to clean energy has
2 the potential to grow our economy and create
3 millions of jobs -- but only if we accelerate that
4 transition. Only if we seize the moment. And
5 only if we rally together and act as one nation --
6 workers and entrepreneurs; scientists and
7 citizens; the public and private sectors.

8 When I was a candidate for this office, I laid
9 out a set of principles that would move our
10 country towards energy independence. Last year,
11 the House of Representatives acted on these
12 principles by passing a strong and comprehensive
13 energy and climate bill -- a bill that finally
14 makes clean energy the profitable kind of energy
15 for America's businesses.

16 Now, there are costs associated with this
17 transition. And there are some who believe that
18 we can't afford those costs right now. I say we
19 can't afford not to change how we produce and use
20 energy -- because the long-term costs to our
21 economy, our national security, and our
22 environment are far greater.

23 So I'm happy to look at other ideas and
24 approaches from either party -- as long they
25 seriously tackle our addiction to fossil fuels.

1 Some have suggested raising efficiency standards
2 in our buildings like we did in our cars and
3 trucks. Some believe we should set standards to
4 ensure that more of our electricity comes from
5 wind and solar power. Others wonder why the
6 energy industry only spends a fraction of what the
7 high-tech industry does on research and
8 development -- and want to rapidly boost our
9 investments in such research and development.

10 All of these approaches have merit, and deserve
11 a fair hearing in the months ahead. But the one
12 approach I will not accept is inaction. The one
13 answer I will not settle for is the idea that this
14 challenge is somehow too big and too difficult to
15 meet. You know, the same thing was said about our
16 ability to produce enough planes and tanks in
17 World War II. The same thing was said about our
18 ability to harness the science and technology to
19 land a man safely on the surface of the moon. And
20 yet, time and again, we have refused to settle for
21 the paltry limits of conventional wisdom.

22 Instead, what has defined us as a nation since our
23 founding is the capacity to shape our destiny --
24 our determination to fight for the America we want
25 for our children. Even if we're unsure exactly

1 what that looks like. Even if we don't yet know
2 precisely how we're going to get there. We know
3 we'll get there.

4 It's a faith in the future that sustains us as
5 a people. It is that same faith that sustains our
6 neighbors in the Gulf right now.

7 Each year, at the beginning of shrimping
8 season, the region's fishermen take part in a
9 tradition that was brought to America long ago by
10 fishing immigrants from Europe. It's called "The
11 Blessing of the Fleet," and today it's a
12 celebration where clergy from different religions
13 gather to say a prayer for the safety and success
14 of the men and women who will soon head out to
15 sea -- some for weeks at a time.

16 The ceremony goes on in good times and in bad.
17 It took place after Katrina, and it took place a
18 few weeks ago -- at the beginning of the most
19 difficult season these fishermen have ever faced.

20 And still, they came and they prayed. For as a
21 priest and former fisherman once said of the
22 tradition, "The blessing is not that God has
23 promised to remove all obstacles and dangers. The
24 blessing is that He is with us always," a blessing
25 that's granted "even in the midst of the storm."

1 The oil spill is not the last crisis America
2 will face. This nation has known hard times
3 before and we will surely know them again. What
4 sees us through -- what has always seen us
5 through -- is our strength, our resilience, and
6 our unyielding faith that something better awaits
7 us if we summon the courage to reach for it.

8 Tonight, we pray for that courage. We pray for
9 the people of the Gulf. And we pray that a hand
10 may guide us through the storm towards a brighter
11 day. Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless
12 the United States of America.

13 (END)

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