

News from Senator

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ALASKA OIL SPILL: A NEW LOOK  
AT THE OIL POLLUTION LIABILITY AND  
COMPENSATION ACT -- WHERE WAS THE SENATE?

WASHINGTON -- THE MONDAY MORNING QUARTERBACKS ARE COMING OUT OF THE WOODWORK IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND OIL TANKER DISASTER -- AND MAKE NO MISTAKE, IT IS A DISASTER OF UNIMAGINED PROPORTIONS.

I WOULD LIKE TO COMMEND THOSE WHO ARE ON THE FRONT LINE, BATTLING TO CONTAIN THE SPILL AND REDUCE ITS TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES. FOR ITS PART, EXXON HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROCEED WITH AN "OPEN CHECKBOOK" COMMITMENT; IT MADE THE MESS AND IT'S GOT TO FACE THE CONSEQUENCES.

I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH AND ALASKA GOVERNOR STEVE COWPER FOR COORDINATING WHAT WILL MOST CERTAINLY BE A MULTI-YEAR BATTLE AGAINST THIS POLLUTION NIGHTMARE.

SENATORS TED STEVENS AND FRANK MURKOWSKI HAVE DEMONSTRATED GREAT LEADERSHIP ON THIS HOME STATE CRISIS AND THEY HAVE BEEN TIRELESS ADVOCATES FOR ALASKA IN ITS TIME OF NEED -- WE SALUTE OUR COLLEAGUES FOR THEIR GOOD WORK IN TOUGH TIMES.

CRITICISM

UNFORTUNATELY, THE CLEAN-UP IS NOT BEING HELPED AT ALL BY THOSE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO POINT FINGERS, CRITICIZE, AND COMPLAIN -- ALL OF THAT MODAY MORNING QUARTERBACKING WON'T CLEAN UP A DROP OF OIL, AND WON'T SAVE ONE FISH, ONE BIRD OR ONE SEA OTTER.

WE HAVE A MAN-MADE DISASTER IN ALASKA, AND MAN MUST DO ALL IT CAN TO HELP NATURE HEAL ITSELF. WE'LL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO LAY BLAME IN THE FUTURE. WHAT WE NEED TO DO FOR ALASKA IS GET OUT OF THE WAY OF THOSE WHO ARE DEPLOYING THE BOOMS, THE SKIMMERS AND THE DISPERSANTS AND LET THEM GET THEIR JOB DONE.

NEED TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

BUT THERE IS SOMETHING POSITIVE WE CAN DO IN THE MEANTIME TO REDUCE THE EFFECTS OF THE NEXT OIL SPILL; AND WE CAN ALSO HELP REDUCE THE EFFECTS OF SOME FAULTY SENATE THINKING.

IN 1984, THE U.S. BECAME A SIGNATOR OF PROTOCOLS WHICH CALL FOR THE UNITED STATES TO JOIN OTHER NATIONS OF THE WORLD IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL FUND AND STRIKE FORCE TO ATTACK SPILLS THAT MIGHT OCCUR ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.

FOR EXAMPLE, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF AN OIL TANKER REGISTERED IN SOME SMALL, POOR AND DISTANT NATION BY AN OWNER OF DIFFERENT NATIONALITY AND QUESTIONABLE CHARACTER WERE TO RUN AGROUND OFF ANTARCTICA?

AS CRUDE OIL CONTINUED DAY AFTER DAY TO LEAK FROM THE SHIP AND SPOIL THE PRISTINE ENVIRONMENT OF OUR GLOBE'S SOUTHERN POLE, THE U.S. WOULD BE FORCED TO SCRAMBLE FOR COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITH OTHER COUNTRIES. WE WOULD BE CAUGHT WITH OUR PLANS DOWN. WHY? BECAUSE THE TRUTH IS, THE OIL POLLUTION LIABILITY AND COMPENSATION ACT HAS BEEN LANQUISHING IN COMMITTEE -- IN OTHER WORDS, IT HAS SUFFERED DEATH BY COMMITTEE. FOR YEARS, THIS COMMITTEE INACTION HAS HELPED BLOCK OUR EFFORTS TO ENDORSE THE PROTOCOLS SO WE CAN JOIN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO STAND READY IN THE FACE OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY.

THIS LEGISLATION PASSED THE HOUSE IN THE 99TH CONGRESS, ONLY TO MEET OPPOSITION IN THE SENATE. IT'S NOW TIME FOR THE SENATE TO DO SOMETHING POSITIVE, TO TAKE A NEW, URGENT LOOK AT THE COMPREHENSIVE OIL POLLUTION LIABILITY AND COMPENSATION ACT. WE'LL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO POINT FINGERS ON THE PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND TRAGEDY ONCE WE CLEAN UP OUR OWN HOUSE.

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