

The bills will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASSIDY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The senior Senator from Louisiana.

MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR THE VICTIMS OF THE DEEPWATER HORIZON TRAGEDY

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I rise today to solemnly observe the 5-year anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon oilspill, also known as the BP disaster. It was a major and deeply tragic incident that resulted in the loss of 11 lives in the Gulf of Mexico and beyond that really devastated the gulf region.

I wish to start where we should always start—by remembering in a solemn and prayerful way the 11 men who lost their lives in the incident. They were Donald “Duck” Clark, 49, of Newellton, LA; Stephen Ray Curtis, 40, of Georgetown, LA; Gordon Jones, 28, of Baton Rouge, LA; Roy Wyatt Kemp, 27, of Jonesville, LA; Keith Blair Manuel, 56, of Gonzalez, LA; Jason Anderson, 35, of Midfield, TX; Adam Weise, 24, of Yorktown, TX; Aaron Dale Durkeen, 37, of Philadelphia, MS; Karl Kleppinger, Jr., 38, of Natchez, MS; Dewey Revette, 48, of State Line, MS; and Shane Roshto, 22, of Liberty, MS. We lift up those men and their families in our prayers, and we will continue to keep those men whose lives were lost and continue to keep their families in our fervent thoughts and prayers.

While 5 years have passed, the effects of the Deepwater Horizon tragedy are still felt today in communities all along the gulf coast. The terrible and unnecessary loss of life, the harming of our precious coastal ecosystems, and the persisting economic burdens serve as a constant reminder of the failures that led to the spill, as well as the lessons learned in the 5 years since.

Poor industry and government oversight and the failure by many involved to enforce safety regulations were largely responsible for multiple mistakes leading up to the tragedy. As a result, we have learned many lessons on how to prevent future accidents such as this. The first is that the lives and safety of the men and women who work in this field are absolutely paramount and need to be kept so, and the Federal and State safety standards overseeing them should reflect that as a priority.

Changes are needed, and the Federal agencies that oversee and regulate the offshore energy industry must communicate clearly with State and local governments and impacted industries. They must also do a better job of en-

forcing strong, necessary safety and environmental standards.

It is also important that we prevent the administration or any future administration from having knee-jerk reactions to incidents such as this. Each gulf coast community remembers the devastating effects of the offshore drilling moratorium that followed the disaster—something that was completely unnecessary, including in the opinion of so many experts. Once the Obama administration imposed this unnecessary drilling moratorium, that decision had crippling results for Louisiana and Gulf State economies. When accidents such as this spill happen, there needs to be a calculated, logical, and immediate response in order to replace ineffective regulations with rules that focus on preserving lives and protecting the environment. It is imperative that we prevent shortsighted Federal mandates and thoughtless regulations that hinder regional recovery and destroy local economies instead.

We also learned that there needs to be a clear and specific judicial penalty process in place in order to ensure that claims can be efficiently filed and finalized in order to let those who are affected by such disasters return to some sense of normalcy, day-to-day normalcy, and economic normalcy as quickly as possible. This should include insuring responsible parties such as BP are timely in paying their judicially and statutorily mandated fines and penalties. There is absolutely no excuse that 5 years later gulf residents, in many cases, are still waiting for the responsible parties to fulfill their legal obligations, including under the RESTORE Act.

As we remember the Deepwater Horizon tragedy today, let us renew our commitment to work on all of these matters and to finish the work that is left to do as our gulf coastlines and economies continue to recover.

Thank you, Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. CASSIDY. Madam President, 5 years ago today, 11 Americans were lost when the Deepwater Horizon exploded off the gulf coast. I would like to name them. This is hard. These were the people we grew up with. I apologize for being emotional, but these are our neighbors, and so to remember them—Jason Anderson 35, Midfield, TX. Jason had two kids, and his wife Shelley said that Thanksgiving was his favorite holiday.

Aaron Dale “Bubba” Burkeen, 37, of Philadelphia, MS. He passed on his wedding anniversary and 4 days before his birthday. He was married with two children.

Donald Clark, 49, of Newellton, LA. Husband to Sheila with four kids. He was a fisherman. To honor him on the anniversary of his death, his family says a prayer and releases balloons over a lake in his favorite color, which is sky blue.

Stephen Ray Curtis, 40, of Georgetown, LA. Stephen was married and the father of two teenagers.

Gordon Jones of Baton Rouge, LA. Gordon was 28. His wife was Michelle. His son Max was born 3 weeks after Gordon passed. An oak tree was planted on the LSU campus on the path where he ran.

Roy Wyatt Kemp, 27, of Jonesville, LA. He was married to Courtney and father of one child.

Karl Kleppinger, Jr., 38, of Natchez, MS. He was a veteran of the first gulf war and the father of one.

Keith Blair Manuel, 56, of Gonzales, LA. Keith had three daughters, was a big fan of LSU sports, and had football and basketball season tickets.

Dewey A. Revette, 48, of State Line, MS. His wife was Sherri. They had been married for 26 years.

Shane M. Roshto, 22, of Liberty, MS. He was the youngest of the men who died. His wife was Natalie, and his son is Blaine.

Adam Weise, 24, of Yorktown, TX. Adam drove 10 hours to Louisiana every 3 weeks to work on the rig. He was a high school football star and spent his off time hunting and fishing.

We pray that the families find peace in the memories of their sons, husbands, and fathers.

The spill was the worst in our Nation's history, and while the consequences of this spill are still seen, it is our task to live forward and, in so doing, honor the memory of these men and provide a better future for their families.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that there be a moment of silence to honor their memory.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(Moment of silence.)

Mr. CASSIDY. Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FIVE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEEPWATER HORIZON TRAGEDY

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, it is 5 in the afternoon. Exactly 5 years ago, at 5 p.m., the crew of the Deepwater Horizon mobile oil drilling unit began what is called a negative pressure test of the Macondo prospect oil formation. A cascade of menacing events followed the first failed test.

At around 9:40 that evening, drilling mud began gushing out onto the rig. The well had kicked. The crew activated the rig's blowout preventer 1 mile below the surface of the Gulf of Mexico, down at the bottom of the gulf.

Tragically, the blowout preventer failed. At 9:49 p.m., there was an explosion on the rig floor. The Deepwater Horizon rig quickly became an inferno. Eleven men died. Eleven families were changed forever.

As morning came the next day, an oil sheen 2 miles long and a half mile wide shone on the surface of the waters of the gulf as the blaze on the rig continued. Those images are seared into our collective mind's eyes. So the owner of the well, BP, and the owner and operator of the rig, Transocean, tried and failed again to close the blowout preventer that evening. Then days later, on Earth Day, April 22, at 10:22 a.m., the rig on the surface of the gulf sank.

If we can remember, we were first told the sheen that was 2 miles long and a half mile wide came from the drums of diesel onboard the rig. Then later, a revision was made that 1,000 barrels of oil a day were leaking from the well a mile below the surface of the gulf. Then that was changed to 5,000 barrels of oil per day and then to 25,000 barrels of oil a day. But none of those estimates were true. Scientists looking at the sheen from aerial observations started to grow very skeptical about what BP engineers were telling them.

On the environment committee, Chairman BOXER and I started to turn up the public pressure to get BP to turn over live footage of 1 mile below the surface of the gulf, where the oil was escaping. We wanted to see how much oil the cameras were showing was escaping from the well. The spill was not out of mind; it was out of sight. As it turned out, unbelievably, 62,000 barrels of oil a day were gushing into the gulf into what is one of our most productive ecosystems on the planet. But we would never have gotten that had scientists not been able to make their estimates by virtue of the live-streaming video that Senator BOXER and I put up on our Web sites so people—unencumbered, around the globe—could make their estimates. This is a prime example of why we must independently verify what oil companies tell us about a spill.

As we got into the summer, the prime of the summer beach season, especially at our beaches in Florida, that was devastating. Nearly 37 percent of gulf waters were closed to fishing. BP and its contractors had no control of the runaway well. On July 15, in the middle of the summer—87 days after the explosion—BP finally stopped the oil flow.

Today is the anniversary. Our hearts collectively go out to the families that lost the 11 men.

If we don't learn from this experience, shame on us. It will come back to haunt us, and in many ways it already has.

If we start at the bottom of the food chain, there are impacts to the gulf environment. Bull minnows, or killifish—little fish about that size—root around in the sediment of the bays of Louisiana. In those oiled Louisiana

marshes, these little killifish are showing grotesquely deformed gill tissue. And when the killifish embryos were exposed to oil sediment, they showed heart defects, and many failed to hatch.

Two LSU professors told me shortly after they had done the research about a year after the spill that they found that the killifish in their reproductive cycle were mutated. They compared them to the killifish in the bays that did not have the oil come in, and there was a distinct difference between the two.

As we go up the food chain, the top predators face threats from the oil. Scientists have found unusual lung damage, hormone abnormalities, and low blood cell counts up the food chain in dolphins that were exposed to the oil. And we are not going to know the full extent of the impact for years, even decades.

As a matter of fact, somebody said a few months after the BP spill had been contained that there was no more oil in the gulf. There is a lot of oil in the gulf. We just can't see it. It is down there a mile below the surface. And what are the effects on the health, the future health of the gulf? We don't know, but we are going to have to research it.

But even with all we learned back in 2010, to this very day, oil infrastructure in the gulf—this is just unbelievable—operated by the Taylor Energy Company continues to leak crude oil since one of the hurricanes years ago. In 2004, a hurricane caused an underwater mudslide that damaged a cluster of oil wells off of Louisiana. Need I remind the Senate, June 1 is the beginning of hurricane season. So if we are visited by another hurricane, and if it does as it did in 2004, 11 years ago, having a cluster of Taylor wells that got buried in an undersea mudslide from the hurricane—but the wells are still leaking 11 years later—what is going to happen to other oil structures in the gulf if the big one comes?

According to the Associated Press investigation, the actual flow rate of those Taylor wells may be 20 times higher than originally reported. We have seen this episode before. I don't think we want to repeat this.

It is so frightening. I asked the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Secretary of the Interior to provide any and all images of the Taylor spill. The Congress, in our oversight responsibility, has the right to that information. We have to know how much oil is escaping, and then we have to figure out how to stop it from underneath the undersea mudslide that covered up that cluster of wells.

In the coming weeks in the Senate commerce committee we are going to examine what we have learned in 5 years since the Deepwater Horizon explosion. In 2012, our bipartisan RESTORE Act got overwhelming votes in both the House and the Senate. The RESTORE Act is a formula with which

to send the money that ultimately Judge Barbier of the Federal district court in New Orleans will decide as a result of the number of barrels spilled and the culpability of the company. As a result of that, money will flow. It will flow back to the local governments, it will flow back to help the economies of the gulf, and it will flow back in order to try to protect our environment. There is more to be done. I intend to introduce legislation to make sure we prevent, prepare for, and effectively respond to the next oil spill.

As we reflect on the tragic events of April 20, 2010, I hope the Senate will be mindful of this tragedy in the gulf, which riveted the attention of the Nation, that seemed out of control for 3 months, and of which we will have the very infernal consequences for years to come.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Sasse). Will the Senator withhold his request?

Mr. NELSON. Of course.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF GEORGE C. HANKS, JR., TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of George C. Hanks, Jr., of Texas, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there is 16 minutes of debate remaining on the nomination.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, do I have 15 minutes?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, tonight, the Senate will vote on the nomination of George Hanks to be a district judge for the Southern District of Texas. If confirmed, Judge Hanks will be the President's 309th judicial nominee confirmed since this President took office. By comparison, at the same point in his Presidency, President Bush had only 273 judicial nominees confirmed.

Despite some of the complaints that we are hearing from my colleagues on the other side, we are moving judicial nominees at about the same pace as we did at this point in President Bush's Presidency. One difference, of course, is how the Senate handled the judicial nominees that were reported out of the committee during the lame-duck session.