

Presidential commission denounces deep sea drilling moratorium

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The co-chairs of the White House-appointed commission tasked with investigating the Deepwater Horizon disaster have spoken out against President Obama's moratorium on new deep-sea drilling operations.

Tasked with investigating the causes of the BP oil blowout and its impact on the Gulf states, the commission held its first public meetings on Monday and Tuesday. The commission is chaired by Bob Graham, a former Democratic governor and senator from Florida, and former EPA head William Reilly. Reilly has spent the last 17 years on the board of energy giant ConocoPhillips.

"If there's a single point of consensus as we've been down here, it's that the moratorium is doing very significant economic damage to this area," Reilly told the *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans.

"We're going to look over their shoulder and have some comments to make as to whether we think the judgments they made are appropriate," said Graham of his intention to confront the Obama administration on the issue of the drilling ban.

The suddenness with which Reilly and Graham have come out in favor of rescinding the offshore drilling moratorium only underscores the true nature of their commission. Ostensibly given the responsibility of investigating the oil spill and making recommendations to the Obama administration on how best to prevent or recover from future spills, the commission is not scheduled to complete its investigations until January of next year. Yet after just two days worth of public meetings behind them, during which no testimony from representatives of BP or the US Coast Guard was challenged and few follow-up questions were asked, the commission is prepared to recommend the withdrawal of the drilling moratorium.

On Tuesday, Reilly described being "moved" by the testimony of Democratic Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, who denounced the moratorium during her remarks before the commission.

"Whether you call it a moratorium, a suspension, or a pause, the result will still be a substantial loss of jobs," Landrieu told the commission on Tuesday. "Even the revised moratorium will force thousands of hard-working Louisianians and others along the Gulf Coast into the unemployment lines."

Landrieu received \$16,000 in campaign donations from BP in 2008, making her the recipient of the largest donations from the London-based firm to a member of Congress during that election cycle.

Landrieu's invocation of unemployed workers and substantial job losses was little more than a cynical ploy. The so-called moratorium in fact affected only a handful of operations. Far more jobs have been lost by the destruction of the Gulf Coast tourism and fishing industries.

Nonetheless, defenders of the oil industry and the elected officials in the oil companies' pockets are demanding a complete reopening of deep-sea operations. Obama's commission on the BP spill is now giving such figures an "official" and "independent" cover to further legitimize their push to resume drilling in what is supposedly the public interest.

Far from an independent investigating body, the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling is another piece in the cover-up of the spill by the Obama administration and BP.



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