

Dear Senator,

The Gulf oil spill disaster is far from over. We were hopeful this summer that the Senate would follow the House in enacting an oil spill response bill, but as media coverage waned, so too did the promise of relief for Gulf Coast citizens. It is unconscionable that the Senate left Washington to campaign without addressing the oil spill disaster. **Passing a strong oil spill response bill must be a top priority when the Senate returns to Washington in November.** The efforts of individuals alone will not be enough to restore the national treasure that is the Gulf Coast; our government must be a true partner in these efforts, investing in the Gulf for the good of our entire nation.

Our hearts go out to our sisters and brothers across the Gulf Coast as we hear their stories of anguish in response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Far too many of these vulnerable individuals have lost their jobs. Communities, too, are vulnerable as food security, physical and mental health and public safety have all been threatened. God's creation groans under the untold stress of five million barrels of oil sinking into the depths of a rich and complex ecosystem. The oil spill has touched every aspect of Gulf Coast life, both human and ecological. As a nation, we cannot and must not abandon the residents and the region to undertake an unaided recovery.

People of faith are often first responders when disaster strikes, and this disaster is no different. We bear witness to the suffering of families and communities in the region, and we are doing what we can to provide short-term relief and resources for long-term restoration.

The Congressional response must address immediate human and ecological needs and lay the groundwork for long-term restoration. We urge you again to rise above partisan politics and enact a spill response bill based on the following principles:

- **Work directly with stakeholders** in the region, particularly the most affected communities, to develop a response and long-term restoration strategy that meets the needs of the people, the creatures and the environment that are suffering as a result of this spill.
- **Hold responsible parties fully accountable** for this calamity and its economic and environmental repercussions by ensuring that those responsible provide sufficient resources to respond to the short- and long-term impacts of the spill on communities and ecosystems.
- **Ensure that help reaches those in need.** Without federal leadership, we fear that many who are suffering from the results of this spill, both directly and indirectly, will not receive the assistance they need and deserve. Increased resources for mental health care, food security, and other immediate human needs are necessary and the social safety net in the region must be strengthened to respond to such increased need.
- **Commit to long-term recovery** efforts, based on sound and independent science, which meet the needs of the affected communities and ecosystems. To meet this goal, agencies responsible for oil industry monitoring and oversight must be fully funded and fully staffed and the affected communities must have effective mechanisms for input in long-term restoration plans.

- **Take steps to prevent future disasters**, including structural changes in the oil and gas permitting process; greater transparency and local participation in permitting decisions; increased monitoring and oversight; and increased liability for companies that violate rules or engage in risky behavior.
- **Respond to yet-unknown needs** and remain attentive to the Gulf Coast through the creation of a Regional Citizen's Advisory Council, with input from local leaders including faith-based and socially vulnerable communities.

Though incomplete, the Clean Energy Jobs and Oil Company Accountability Act (S. 3663) begins to respond to the needs in the Gulf. We applaud the inclusion of OCS reform provisions, an increased liability cap, and a Regional Citizens' Advisory Council and we commend the efforts of Senators Bingaman and Murkowski to move forward S. 3516, an independent OCS reform bill.

While this legislation alone is insufficient to affect a comprehensive response, it is vital that we begin to tackle the environmental and human needs exacerbated by the spill. We urge you to build on previously introduced legislation to pass a strong oil spill response bill this year.

As elected officials and community leaders, you are called to recognize and respond to this catastrophe in a manner that meets the needs of those suffering today and lays a foundation for long-term restoration. Partisan politics cannot dictate how our nation responds to those in need, or to the needs of God's creation. Our faith, compassion, and respect for our sisters and brothers must guide the way forward. They cannot wait, and you must act this year.

Sincerely,

Church of the Brethren
Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
Disciples Justice Action Network
Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Franciscan Action Network
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
National Council of Churches
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness
Sojourners
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Union for Reform Judaism
United Church of Christ
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth