

SHELBY CONTINUES TO PRESS FOR GULF COAST ASSISTANCE

WASHINGTON, DC, Wednesday, May 26, 2010 – U.S. Senator Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), ranking member of the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, today on the Senate floor offered an amendment to the fiscal year 2010 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill to provide assistance to Gulf Coast fishermen harmed by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

On May 18, 2010, Shelby wrote a letter to U.S. Commerce Secretary, Gary Locke, to request a fisheries disaster declaration, as is required under current law. Upon such a declaration, Congress must appropriate funds for the affected communities. On May 24th, Locke issued an official declaration. The amendment Shelby offered today seeks to provide funding pursuant to the disaster declaration.

“Now, it is up to Congress to ensure that our fishermen who will be adversely impacted by this oil spill for years to come receive adequate assistance. Today, I offer an amendment to help our Gulf Coast communities mitigate the disastrous effects of the oil spill,” Shelby said. “I ask my colleagues to support the people of the Gulf Coast by supporting my amendment.”

The amendment would:

- Provide \$20 million for the fisheries disaster declaration in the Gulf.
- Provide \$1 million for the Secretary of Commerce to require a National Academy of Sciences study on the long-term ecosystem service impacts of the spill on the Gulf. In particular, it would assess long-term costs to water filtration, hunting, fishing (commercial and recreational), and other economic values associated with the Gulf.
- Provide \$15 million for an expanded stock assessment of the Gulf fisheries - including, but not limited to, commercial and recreational catch and biological sampling, observer programs, data management and processing, conducting assessments, and follow-up evaluations.

Shelby’s full statement, as prepared and included in the record, is as follows:

“Mr. President, it is now day 37 of the oil spill. We are no closer to finding a solution to this crisis than we were on day one.

“Oil continues to pour into the Gulf at an unprecedented rate – significantly more than the estimate of 5,000 barrels a day.

“Oil has reached deep into the Louisiana marshes. Tar balls have washed up on the shores of Alabama and Mississippi.

“As long as this oil continues to flow into the Gulf we have a real and unprecedented disaster.

"On May 18, I requested that the Secretary of Commerce declare a fisheries disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Alabama's fishing industry represents one of the largest economic engines in the state, accounting for more than \$800 million in annual sales and nearly 18,000 jobs.

"On Monday, the Secretary declared a fisheries disaster in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

"Now, it is up to Congress to ensure that our fishermen who will be adversely impacted by this oil spill for years to come receive adequate assistance.

"Today, I offer an amendment to help our Gulf Coast communities mitigate the disastrous effects of the oil spill. This amendment is not more spending, but offset from the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund. It further requires 'responsible parties' to reimburse the Trust Fund for funding the federal government puts towards this amendment.

"First, this amendment provides \$20 million to fund the Secretary of Commerce's disaster declaration. NOAA has closed 22.4 percent of the commercial and recreational fisheries in the Gulf because of the spill.

"This declaration will allow the federal government to put additional, immediate federal resources towards this disaster to alleviate and recover from the devastating impacts to the Gulf's fisheries.

"However, this declaration has no teeth if it is not funded. While I hoped the Administration would realize this by requesting an amendment to the Supplemental, they have not. My amendment will provide the resources necessary to help our Gulf Coast region.

"Second, it provides NOAA with the resources necessary to begin an expanded stock assessment in the Gulf.

"A comprehensive stock assessment is critical to the Gulf where there are hundreds of species managed under fisheries management plans or international conventions. NOAA recently identified the needed steps to improve and expand stock assessments in the Gulf and to do so, they will need the best and most timely data on the health and abundance of the stocks. This amendment will provide \$15 million to NOAA to begin an expanded stock assessment. We must know what the fisheries stocks in the Gulf are now, so we will have a better idea how the oil has affected them.

"Finally, this amendment will provide funding to the National Academy of Sciences to study the long-term ecosystem impacts of the spill on the Gulf.

"It is critical to proactively work to adequately deal with this man-made crisis. If the oil continues to spill in the Gulf unabated, it will not only destroy the fisheries this year, but will adversely impact the Gulf's ecosystem for decades.

"Mr. President, we cannot simply sit by and wait for this problem to solve itself. Clearly, we all know that BP has not yet come up with a solution.

“We must continue to ensure that BP, as the responsible party, pays for all damage related to this oil spill, but that does not mean BP can make all the decisions as to what to do and how to handle the disaster that continues to unfold.

“We have been dealing with this crisis for 37 days and are no closer to stopping the oil spill as we were on day one. Since the spill, BP has failed in every attempt to stop the oil flow.

“Mr. President, we need to begin putting resources in the Gulf to help mitigate the long term effects of what could be the largest and most devastating oil spill in American history.

“I ask my colleagues to support the people of the Gulf Coast by supporting my amendment.”

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NOTE: Please do not respond to this email. If you require further information please contact Senator Shelby's press office at (202)224-6518 or Jonathan_Graffeo@Shelby.Senate.gov