Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 23, 2010

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Steny H. Hoyer
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Hoyer:

We write to commend you on your efforts to craft meaningful legislation addressing many of the long standing problems which led to the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in order to strengthen government oversight and safety regulations for oil and gas development and protect all Americans from future disasters of this magnitude. We are deeply troubled, however, at the prospect that these long overdue reforms could be limited only to offshore development activities even though many of the problems that led to the gulf spill are directly applicable to preventing onshore disasters. We strongly believe that Congress must act swiftly in order to prevent any future catastrophe and urge you to resist efforts to weaken this legislation. The American people cannot afford to suffer another such disaster before Congress takes action.

The need for drilling oversight and reform is not unique to the off-shore setting. Significant incidents, including spills and well blowouts, have occurred just recently in Utah, Texas, Colorado, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Wyoming. Similar spills and contamination incidents are happening nationwide, especially in states that do not have stringent state regulations. These spills are just as serious as those that occur offshore.

The oil and gas industry enjoys exemptions from nearly every major piece of environmental protection law that Congress has enacted to ensure public health by preserving our clean water and air. It is currently the only industry that is exempted from complying with key elements of the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. By giving the oil and gas industry a pass on these important regulations, we're essentially allowing it to self-certify that it has taken the necessary precautions to prevent another catastrophe. That is the same approach that led to the inadequate response plans in the Gulf.

While the reforms included by the relevant House committees in their respective bills do not correct all of these exemptions, these are common sense reforms and moderate compared to the exemptions that currently exist. The reforms that have been put forward by the relevant House Committees address the disaster in the Gulf and the more widespread problems that contributed to it. Many of these address issues that are common to both onshore and offshore oil and gas development.

We cannot afford to wait for another disaster before Congress acts to modernize and improve its safety regulations. The oil and gas industry has clearly demonstrated that it is incapable of regulating itself. Therefore we feel strongly that legislation the House produces to respond to the BP spill and prevent future disasters must include additional reform and oversight of oil and gas production – regardless of whether it occurs onshore or offshore.

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Thank you for your careful consideration of these issues. We look forward to working with you to pass legislation that will strengthen safety oversight and environmental protections of future oil and gas development, wherever it may occur.

Sincerely,

Michael N. Honda

Mazie K. Hirono

Michael E. Capuano

Paul M. Gujalva

Mike Quigley

John Shell

Keith Ellison

John W. Olver

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