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**The White House**

Office of the Press Secretary

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**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, Admiral Thad Allen and Assistant to The President for Energy and Climate Change Carol Browner**

**James S. Brady Press Briefing Room**

3:17 P.M. EDT

MR. GIBBS: Good afternoon. As we get started today we're going to hear from a couple of different people that are working on the administration's response to the oil spill in the Gulf. First you'll hear from Admiral Allen, and then we'll be happy to take your questions.

I will say as a point of introduction, though he rarely needs an introduction, he would normally be in Louisiana were it not for today. His vice commandant is retiring. Tomorrow he is leaving the command of the Coast Guard. But the President and the Secretary of Homeland Security have asked him to delay his retirement and continue to serve as the National Incident Commander for the spill in the Gulf.

So let me turn this over to Admiral Allen.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Thank you very much. Thanks for the opportunity to talk with you here today. I thought I might start out by giving you a little background on the command-and-control system and how oil spills work. But first let me premise -- I would underscore what he said -- I'd much rather be down in Louisiana, the Gulf Coast, dealing with this problem down there because I know it's of concern to everybody. And as somebody who has worked on the water all his life, nothing is more disturbing than oil on any water in our country.

The current paradigm for responding to oil spills really dates back to the legislation that was passed after the Exxon Valdez, the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. It mandated a paradigm by which the responsible party or the spiller would be held accountable. It also created a oil spill liability trust fund to fund responses where there was no responsible party, or to fund operations and have those funds recouped from the responsible party.

It's premised on the country being divided up into areas for the purpose of developing contingency plans. And we have these areas called captain of the port zones; those are the Coast Guard commanders that are responsible for that area. They get together with the state and local stakeholders and they develop plans to protect the most sensitive areas within those areas, and they're called area contingency plans. There is one for every single part of the coastline of the United States. There is one that covers the Gulf Coast as well.

When they have to activate a response, the local Coast Guard commander who is designated the federal on-scene coordinator coordinates with the state and local government and directs the responsible party in the cleanup. If the spill was inland, EPA would be the federal on-scene coordinator. The Coast Guard and EPA share that.

This entire framework is called the national contingency plan, and it is how we have prosecuted oil spills ever since the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. That is the way we have been prosecuting this case since the explosion on the Deepwater Horizon on the 20th of April. Even in advance of the sinking of the drilling unit, we were staging equipment that was against the scenario we would have a worst-case spill. And we started actually mobilizing equipment, salvage engineers and everything right after the event happened into the 21st of April.

So the command-and-control structure down there right now is the commanding officer of the Coast Guard in New Orleans is the federal on-scene coordinator for the response. We have elevated that responsibility to Mary Landry. She is in Robert, Louisiana, and she is called an area unified commander. That's when you take one or more of these zones or these areas and you combine them under a larger command.

So we have a single command in the Gulf. The commander is Rear Admiral Mary Landry. She is supervising subsections. One is New Orleans. The other one is over in Mobile, and Mobile covers Mississippi, Alabama, and the western portion of Florida. There is another command at St. Petersburg, and another one in Key West and around up the East Coast. At this point, they all, for the purpose of this response, report to the area command in

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Robert, Louisiana.

At a higher level we have what we call a regional response team. Those are all the federal players that have responsibilities for an oil spill response. It would be Department of Interior, EPA, Coast Guard, NOAA. And they look at resource requirements across a regional area. Let's say if you had a decision of where to put boom between Mississippi, Alabama, or Louisiana, they would coordinate with the regional response team.

If something gets large enough where there's a national issue about how much boom is in the entire country or where to move dispersants, it would come up to the national response team. And the national response team is the same players, except in Washington in the interagency. So, for instance, the Coast Guard is on the national response team. We co-chair it with EPA -- NOAA, Commerce, DOI, and so forth. So there's a way to bring up resource issues or policy issues that cannot be resolved at the lowest level, and work those all the way up the chain.

There is also the allowance in the national contingency plan that if the resource adjudication process or the coordination becomes complicated -- and it's complicated in this place -- in this case -- that the President has the option of declaring something called a spill of national significance. Again, this is contained in the national contingency plan, and also have the option to designate a national incident commander, which the President and Secretary Napolitano have designated me.

Now, this is not a policy. This is a command-and-control structure. It's actually contained in the code of federal regulations that implement the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. So when you hear us talk about responsible party, or the federal on-scene coordinator, we're actually talking about legal definitions that are derived from statute -- the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 -- that are contained in 40 CFR 300.

So there are actual clear definitions, and I think sometimes we're losing the distinction of what a responsible party or federal on-scene coordinator are. And we'd be glad to go through and answer questions related to the spill response, especially as it relates to BP's role as a responsible party and the roles of the federal on-scene coordinator.

Would you like me to add anything else, or would you like to --

MR. GIBBS: That's a good intro. We'll start with Mr. Feller.

Q Thank you. Thanks for being here, Admiral. Let me start on that point about who's in charge and the quality of the response so far. Secretary Salazar said yesterday, referring to BP, "If we find that they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing, we'll push them out of the way appropriately." What does that mean, "push them out of the way"? What more could be done?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, I would say that's more of a metaphor. What we need to make sure is they execute their responsibilities, the responsible party, and we carry out our responsibilities and be accountable as the federal on-scene coordinators. This is what we do, is if something is going -- if BP is applying resources, there is an operation being conducted, and we want it to be done some other way, they're issued an order by the federal on-scene coordinator, and they comply. And there have been adjustments made all the way along. And if I need to, I call Tony Hayward myself. They're the responsible party, but we have the authority to direct.

Q So their role is still -- to make sure I have this right -- their role is still to be in charge of this operation, and the federal government's role is to be in charge of oversight, and that is not going to change?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I think I'd differentiate "in charge." They are responsible for the cleanup, how that's effected. Ultimately, we are accountable, from the federal government side, to make sure they do it. The law requires them, as the responsible party, to play a certain role -- to pay for it, to provide equipment, and so forth -- and particularly with trying to deal with the leak on the bottom of the ocean. They're 5,000 feet down. BP or the private sector are the only ones that have the means to deal with that problem down there. It's not government equipment that's going to be used to do that. So there's got to be a way where private industry can address the problem with proper oversight by the federal government. I would say it's less a case of "in charge."

Q Is there -- to this point, though, whether the government can do more, can it push BP out of the way if it feels like that company is not doing the job? What is your response to that?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, to push BP out of the way would raise the question to replace them with what?

Q Do you think that this government right now is doing the best it can?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I've been involved with the technical decisions made, especially in relation to deal with the leak, and they are pressing ahead. We are overseeing them. They're exhausting every technical means possible to deal with that leak.

Q Is there a solution?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: There are a number of solutions and they're doing them in sequence based on risk. The ultimate solution is going to be to drill a relief well, take the pressure off that well and cap it. That will be sometime in August. We don't want to wait that long. So we're trying a series of interventions, starting with the insertion tube to evacuate the oil that we can, the top kill shot that will be scheduled for I believe early Wednesday now to try and force mud down the blowout preventer into the well to stop the pressure so it can be sealed.

There's a series of events. They're trying the least risky ones first and moving on down. But we cannot stop. We've got to try every means at our -- every means that we can to stop this leak.

Q Admiral, you said before that you -- and you mentioned just now Mr. Hayward -- you said before that you trust him. Other administration officials don't seem to share that trust. Is there a difference between your view and others in the administration about BP and its CEO?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Oh, I think there may be difference in how we characterize our interactions with him. You have a case where this problem is going to be solved with the private sector working with the federal government. If you don't have confidence in what each party is doing, you don't have the ability to call and speak frankly -- and you can characterize that as trust, being responsible, having credibility, whatever you want -- that has to be present for this to be successful. And it's my responsibility as the National Incident Commander to create those relationships and ensure they're maintained. And I judge personally my communications with anybody, including Tony Hayward, and I would characterize when I tell him something, he says he understands it, he follows up.

Q You said, as well in response to Ben's question if BP were to get out of the way, it raises the question of who would step in. Mr. Suttles, today, from BP said, it would be within the government's area to step in if it wanted to. What does that mean? Could the government step in? Does it have the capacity to do so?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I hear everybody saying it. I'm not sure what that term really means. I know that to work down there you need remotely operated vehicles; you need to do very technical work at 5,000 feet. You need equipment and expertise that's not generally within the government -- federal government in terms of competency, capability or capacity. There may be some other way to get it, but I'm the National Incident Commander and right now the relationship with BP is the way I think we should move forward.

MR. GIBBS: Jake.

Q A couple questions. First of all, if the EPA -- and maybe this is a question for Ms. Browner -- but if the EPA says to BP, we don't want you using this dispersant, we think it's too toxic, and BP says, okay, but we don't care, we're going to do what we want to do anyway, then what avenue does the federal government have to challenge that?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: You want to do the first part, I'll do the second?

MS. BROWNER: Yes, why don't you do the first part?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Okay. If we want BP to do something, even if it appears they do not want to do it, they are issued an administrative order by the federal on-scene coordinator that has the effect of law.

Q But they're not doing it, right?

MS. BROWNER: Well, there's a series of meetings going on. They started last night. Lisa Jackson is in the area and there will be a press advisory or I guess a press conference later today at -- what time?

MR. GIBBS: I think it is --

MS. BROWNER: I want to say 4:30 p.m. or 4:45 p.m. Gulf Coast time. And so they're trying to understand: Are there alternatives available? How rapidly can they be made available? Are they in fact less toxic? It's just a number of issues that have to be worked through. But as the Admiral says, there is a way to stop them if that's where this discussion ends.

Q And, Admiral Allen, the governor of Louisiana, Bobby Jindal, has said that on May 2nd he requested 3 million feet of absorbent boom, 5 million feet of hard boom, 30 jack-up barges, and so far all they've gotten is less than 800,000 feet of boom. In addition, he said a couple weeks ago he asked the Army Corps of Engineers to approve an emergency plan to set up barriers at highlands and they're still waiting to hear. He seemed very, very frustrated that the federal government was not being responsive to the requests that he had specifically made.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I'd like to divide that in two parts, the boom and the barrier island, if I could. Regarding -- and by the way, the last couple days I've been talking to Governor Jindal every day trying to fill him in on where we're going and what the status of operations is.

Regarding boom, our baseline that we start from for boom decisions has to do with those area contingency plans that I explained earlier. Within those plans, they identify the most sensitive resources that need to be protected within a particular geographic area. And this is based on consultation with the people that are actually responsible for the resources, whether at the Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife, NOAA, and so forth.

Those plans preexisted this spill. So what we've done is we've said we want everybody to go back and validate their area contingency plans and we're going to source the first boom we've got available to cover those areas. And beginning -- since we didn't know where the spill was going to go when it started -- and it's no longer a monolithic spill; it's omni-directional, it's in patches, huge circumference, we've got tar balls; some places we got oil actually coming to shore around southern Louisiana. So we have actually sourced boom for a very wide area to meet the minimum requirements of the area contingency plan sensitive areas.

If more oil is coming and you identify extra requirements, then we are trying to fill those. But we thought the most equitable way to do it would be to use the plans that the states were part of approving as a baseline distribution of boom, and then move beyond that based on the justification and requirements of where the oil was coming to shore.

So we are doing that. We're taking care of the area contingency plan first, and additional requests that are coming in, we are responding to those.

Q How much boom do you have to give out?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I don't have -- we put out a daily boom report every day. But I think we are well over 2 million feet deployed. And we have a warehousing -- a virtual warehouse set up in Louisiana, and we distribute to the entire area. One of the things we -- when we started out, everybody was ordering their own boom. And we actually had these different areas competing against each other and even bidding up the price, in some cases. So we've actually gone to a centralized distribution system for the entire coast that's coordinated in conjunction with area command in Robert, Louisiana. And we can give you the details.

Q Can you just answer my question about the Army Corps of Engineers?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Yes. I'm going to give you my characterization of the Army's side, and I don't want to get into too much detail because it's a process they own. The state has applied for a permit that would take a look at establishing a system of barrier islands and berm structures -- one to the east of the Mississippi River on the Chandeleur Islands or Breton Sound; the other one basically from around Grand Isle over to the west -- to the east towards the Mississippi River.

The Army Corps of Engineers is evaluating that right now. They're looking at the cost and the schedule, the feasibility, the engineering issues associated with it, where the sediments would come from -- you have to go get them from someplace to deposit them there. What are the implications of where you remove the sediments from? How high do you have to build the berms if you were going to build them and what is the ecological impact associated with that?

They have not finished that review. But what I promised Governor Jindal personally in a conversation is we would start looking at it now, so we wouldn't have to wait for the Corps of Engineers to hear the Coast Guard -- what do you think about it. We're looking at it in parallel with them.

We need to understand, though, that building a set of barrier islands and berms that large is going to take a very, very long time even by the state's own estimate -- six to nine months in some cases -- and a significant amount of resources associated with that that might be applied elsewhere. So we're looking at everything having to do with the proposal. I've been in touch frequently with Governor Jindal. We're trying to drive to a decision that we can announce as soon as we can.

Q Admiral, early on, what kind of reassurances did BP give you about being able to stop this leak quickly?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: The discussion has mainly revolved around the fact that the technologies that are being employed here are not novel or new. I think one of the mistakes that's being made by a lot of folks who don't understand the industry -- and I've learned more about it, frankly, since I started -- is that the procedures to try and stop this blowout or this wellhead down there are the same that they would use on land or anyplace else.

The problem is exacerbated and much more complicated by the fact that it's 5,000 feet below the surface; there's no human access; the only information we have down there is what is derived from remotely operated vehicles or other sensors that are down there. So everything we see is a two-dimensional video representation of what that particular -- or what we can see at any particular time.

So instead of going out and putting some new hoses onto a well and jamming mud down it on the surface, you have to replace the umbilical cord that existed in the riser pipe that was there to begin with and completely rebuild that system, then test every section of it until you're ready for that top kill shot.

So the things that are going on are absolutely logical; they're consistent with oilfield engineering and practices that are done on land. They're just being done in a place where it hasn't been done in the history of oil drilling before.

Q I understand that, but what did they give you in terms of a timeline as to -- early on -- as to when they thought they could get it capped?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, the ultimate timeline is August for the relief well, for the permanent solution.

Q So they told you that early on? They said, we may not be able to do this until August?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: They said the ultimate solution is to drill a relief well and cap the current well and that will be at least 90 days -- we're looking generally at August right now. In the meantime, there's a series of sequential steps they have tried. And you saw the collection device that did not work, the insertion tube that appears to be working and having some effect, and now they're looking at the top kill -- or putting under pressure this very, very heavy mud that would stop the column of hydrocarbon so they can seal it. After that, there are a series of other steps they're considering.

These were all laid out. They've been provided to us. Secretary Salazar, Secretary Chu have seen them. There are Gantt charts associated with dates. The dates have slipped to the right in some cases because these systems are working out as they deploy to the seabed. But there's been total visibility of that since they started proposing the way forward.

MR. GIBBS: Dan, if I can add to that -- the Admiral just mentioned Secretary Chu at the Department of Energy. Understanding that when talking about oil, the Department of Energy's only purview over oil is the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, but as a result of the fact that we just happen to have a Nobel Prize-winning physicist on our staff -- along with hundreds of others of the brightest minds in all of the world working out of the National Laboratories -- Secretary Chu has been in the command center and has spent hours on the phone with the scientists from the private sector as well as with the company in order to go through a lot of different calculations to set up a process so that this can work -- or this has the best chance of working on Wednesday.

Q So they basically laid out all these different steps: This is what we're going to try first. Then if that doesn't work we're going to try this. Ultimately August may be the only sure solution.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I think you would generally characterize that they have four or five what I would call lines of effort. The overarching line of effort is the relief well. Before that they have tried the capture devices, piped oil to the top; there were two evolutions of that and then finally the insertion tube is working. The next one is to try and kill the well, as they would say. That's going to be done by inserting a very high pressure of heavy mud to drive the hydrocarbons down so they can seal it. If that does not work, they have two options after that. One is to sever the marine riser pipe and attempt to put a valve in.

They're not doing that first because when you sever that marine riser pipe you don't know how many hydrocarbons are going to come out and how much oil is being held by the fact that that riser pipe is bent.

After that they could take the lower marine riser package which sits above the blowout preventer and just physically remove it and put a whole new blowout preventer right on top of it. One of those is staged on the DD2 that's drilling the second relief well out there and is ready to go as the backup to the current actions they are trying. So they have a series of events with backup actions behind them, and they're sequentially trying the ones that involve the least risk in that order.

I was out on the rigs last Thursday. I actually went through -- this was my second trip out there -- I looked at the blowout preventer, was briefed on their plans. They make sense. They're going in sequence, and they're dealing with problems as they arise.

MR. GIBBS: And I would say this. The relief well is the permanent solution. So even the injection of the heavy mud and the ceiling is still going to be -- is done in place for the relief wells, which is the ultimate, more permanent solution. And Carol reminded me that we instructed them not to simply drill one but two relief wells so that we had some margin on that.

Helen, do you have something? Are you good?

Q Is there a blame game going on?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: If there is, I'm not playing it. (Laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: Helen, first and foremost, we are trying to do everything, as I've said, human and technologically possible, first to plug this leak, and secondly, to deal with what has spilled and both the environmental and economic impacts of that oil, understanding, as Admiral Allen said, that because of the nature of the dispersants, the currents, the wind, the weather -- we are watching where this oil moves, the degree to which that it could get into the Loop Current, and a whole host of other things, in order to get a hold of this.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Helen, I didn't mean to be glib --

Q Is Louisiana cooperating -- Jindal?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Yes, ma'am. I didn't mean to be glib. Whenever there's oil on the water, nothing good happens, and nobody should be satisfied. And when oil is on the water, it's an insult to the environment, quite frankly. And we've been working very, very closely with the state of Louisiana.

All the states down there have needs that go beyond their area contingency plans they would like to see met. And ultimately it's a matter of adjudicating the resources you have at the time. But we are involved with these folks every day, ma'am.

Q Thank you for being here, Admiral. Clearly, plugging the leak is number one at this point. And I do understand, I think we all understand, that it's BP that has the expertise and the equipment. But what exactly is the role of the federal government in plugging the leak? To what degree are you working with, commanding, offering advice, bringing in the best minds? What is the role of the federal government in plugging the leak?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I'd say we're actually defining that as we go, because I've never dealt with a scenario like this. I've been dealing with oil spills for over 30 years. This is an unprecedented anomalous event. And as we move forward and we look at how we're going to control the leak ultimately, it requires BP to say this is a standard industry practice. Before they go forward and do that, they consult with us. We have a veto authority if we think we don't want to do it, keeping in mind they own the means of production. We ask a lot of hard questions. And I can tell you some of the sessions have been inquisitorial in nature regarding the assumptions they're making on pressures -- thresholds inside the pipes and all that sort of thing.

Q Well, I guess that's one of the questions --

MR. GIBBS: Chip, let me just reiterate, that's the -- one of the things that the Admiral just said -- the reason some of that inquisition is taking place, is Secretary Chu and others -- scientists from the National Laboratories -- Secretary Chu and others will be going back down to Houston tomorrow, and have been working throughout this process on having the best ideas come forward, tried, worked out on paper, so that they can be executed to stop this leak.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: The term I would use is due diligence.

Q You just said they own the means of production. But that could change, the government could simply -- the President could simply decide that we now own -- you're going to do the work, but we're going to tell you how to use the people and the equipment here. Isn't that true?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: That may be -- I don't know, I'm not a lawyer. That may be true. That wouldn't be my recommendation.

Q But why -- Secretary Salazar has said that he does not have complete confidence in BP. He said he's not sure they know what they're doing.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: They have the means of production. They have the logistics in place. They have the ROVs that are down there. We are jointly operating in their command post out of Houston. Everybody that has a stake in the fight is there. And I am satisfied with the coordination that's going on.

I think Secretary Salazar is right -- I think he's probably exhibiting the immense amount of frustration we all feel, and that we need to keep pressure on and make sure they are accountable and doing their jobs. As it stands right now, at least in my opinion, the means of production is in the hands of BP; they just need to do their job.

Q Would you say the federal government is monitoring what BP is doing? Or is the federal government actively involved in plugging the leak?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: We are actively involved in the consultations regarding the technical issues related to the strategies provided by BP.

Q And is it fair to say have you --

ADMIRAL ALLEN: They are proffering, okay? They are proffering, if that --

Q How did you -- it sounds like you've said that before. (Laughter.) And they -- and have you brought in these greatest minds in the business? And --

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Yes, National Lab at Sandia --

Q -- the government has done this?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Yes, yes.

Q Are there any assets that you would like to have that you do not have? Have you asked for anything that you have not received from the federal government?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: No, and we've asked for some pretty interesting things. I mean, we have C-17s moving boom from Alaska. We're asking for -- we're using Navy sight-scan sonar. We're using Air Force planes to deliver dispersants. We have a request for assistance process that was worked out with Assistant Secretary Stockton and our staff. If it's a really critical need, we go to him and he will actually seek a verbal order from Secretary Gates to

move the defense equipment where it needs to go. So I would say it's working very, very -- we have access to whatever we need. The question is, the government doesn't have everything we need to solve this problem.

Q So there's no schism with the BP strategies and U.S.?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: The BP strategy as it related to leak control, as we've laid out, I think everybody understands that is the logical sequence. In fact, I've talked to other industry leaders, just to go out and get triangulation, as we would say in nautical terms, and the feedback I'm getting from these other captains of industry is the sequence of events is the sequence that should be followed in this type of case.

MR. GIBBS: But I'll say that -- Helen, if I can say that, I think everybody standing up here, everybody that works over there including the Oval Office, are we frustrated that there's still a hole in the bottom of the ocean leaking oil? You bet. And he's not going to be satisfied --

Q -- have confidence --

MR. GIBBS: He's not going to be satisfied until it's plugged, until we've dealt adequately with what has leaked both in the water column and on the surface.

Q Last question, do you have all the authority you need? Could you pick up the phone and call Secretary Gates or the President if you wanted to? Do you have that kind of authority, and are you doing that?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, not routinely. (Laughter.) I have all the access I need to do my job, yes, sir.

MR. GIBBS: Chuck.

Q Admiral, can you -- do you have the same sense of satisfaction with what BP is now doing onshore as this oil is coming in? Can you explain a little bit now, now that it appears it's almost sort of a two-pronged disaster with oil that's coming onshore, what the federal government is doing there, what BP's role is in that? Obviously the technical stuff having to do with the hole is one aspect of this. What role is BP playing onshore?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Chuck, that's a great question. In fact, there are three fronts. We've got the emissions at the bottom of the ocean. We have where the oil is coming to the surface and trying to fight it as far offshore as we can -- you'd rather deal with it there before it even gets close to shore -- and then how you deal when it makes contact with shore. And the three kind of distinct operations require different sets of -- types of capability. And we're fighting a three-front war basically at once.

If I were to give you an area where I've had more conversations with BP than any other, it's been on the difference between wholesale and retail. BP does wholesale really good as far as massing logistics, moving stuff around, getting it into the warehouses. That last mile of retail, where you get the siting of the oil, you got to get the boom -- you got to coordinate all that, that's where the formation has got to be tightened up. And I had a conversation with Tony Hayward this weekend on that.

So I would say we have more of a play, need to exert more pressure and are exerting more pressure on the retail end where that boom actually hits the water. We're trying to deal with the resources there.

Q So they're sort of the first responders on the cleanup as well? I mean, I understand on the -- I mean, I guess --

ADMIRAL ALLEN: We have what we call shore cleanup assist teams, and they're actually -- they're made up of a combination of federal, state, and local contractors, BP representatives, because you need almost everybody there to kind of coordinate what's going on. So it's a multifunctional team, multi-disciplined team. And they're staffed by the local federal on-scene coordinator.

Q I understand that. In the way you said that on the -- dealing with the whole, it sort of -- BP has the technical expertise and you guys have veto power. Is the role the same here on the cleanup? Or is this a case where the government is sort of pushing BP?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I would say on the shore cleanup side, we have more degrees of freedom and more capability and competency we can bring to bear and a greater, wider set of authorities allow us to effect the outcome than on the sea floor -- that's true.

Q So you have less confidence in BP in how they're handling this? Or is it just --

ADMIRAL ALLEN: No, I think it's further away from their central business competency. I mean, these guys are drilling for oil. This is an oil spill response. And what has happened, quite frankly, in the last 20 years -- and it's a phenomenon of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 -- we have created an industry in this country called oil spill response organizations, or OSROs. We actually created the demand for companies who would build oil spill equipment and could be contracted to clean it up.

A lot of the work that's being done out there has been done by these oil spill response organizations. It was

anticipated that that would happen and as a result of the act, there would be a reason for them to capitalize on the market. So we use a lot of folks that are not BP or Coast Guard to do these things. They are contracted under -- BP paying for it -- a paradigm. But then it all has to be coordinated. And that's where there's a larger role for us there than there probably is on the seabed.

Q So BP does not have -- call the shots, essentially, on this? They're not sort of the --

ADMIRAL ALLEN: No, but they're involved in the execution. And to the extent there's a problem there, then we can bring our authorities to bear, and we do.

MR. GIBBS: Chuck, let me add one other aspect to what the Admiral said about what we're also working through, and that is changing the liability law in Congress and lifting that cap, and setting it to a place that would ensure that the economic damages that are currently capped at \$75 million, per the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, recognize the breadth of this disaster.

Q Can you comment, Robert, really quickly on the New York Times story about the -- whether the -- is there a moratorium in place right now on new drilling, or not?

MR. GIBBS: Carol is better on that.

MS. BROWNER: There is. The President has said no new holes. Let me tell you what --

Q So what are these permits?

MS. BROWNER: So what the Times appears to be talking about are modifications to existing permits. It is quite routine where you're currently drilling and you need to make a modification, you've encountered something that you didn't anticipate, and so you go back in -- and it's called a permit, but I think the better way to think about it is that it's a modification to an existing permit.

There are -- in addition -- so there's that going on. I think that's what the Times is reporting on. There are 23 permits out there for new drilling activities that are not -- have not begun. So what the President said is we're going to stop; those have been stopped. There were two that were issued shortly after the accident. Those have also been stopped. So all of the deepwater permits that were not currently drilling are not going forward at this point in time.

MR. GIBBS: Jonathan.

Q Two questions. Have you -- you talked about what would the alternative be if BP was moved aside. Have you considered hiring another oil company, like Chevron, or an oil spill contractor to take over day-to-day response from BP?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: When I have the CEO of a large petroleum company and oil drilling company tell me they would be following the same sequence of events, that tells me there wouldn't be anything to be gained by doing that. And what they're doing is largely in line with industry standards. It's just made immensely -- exponentially more difficult at 5,000 feet.

Q So have you actually had those discussions with other oil companies?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I have.

Q Can you tell ---

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I will not attribute.

Q And the second one, are you looking at a contingency plan in case the relief wells themselves don't work? We were talking to some contractors today who said that's not a hundred percent sure either.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, I think everybody would -- nobody should give a hundred percent guarantee on anything associated with this incident until it is done. I have not had a conversation with BP beyond the two relief wells. There's been talk there potentially could be a third relief well. Those are discussions we have not had yet. The focus right now is get the two wells that are under construction started, and then do everything we can to minimize the leakage right now in advance of closing out the wells permanently.

MR. GIBBS: Mark.

Q Admiral, you said it would not be your recommendation to change -- for the United States government or you to be in charge of every aspect of this and to push BP out of the way. Are you saying, sir, that if the President said, this has gone on too long, it's day 35, Admiral, take it over, you would argue against that to the President?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: No, any military leader would give his best military advice to the President and then follow

orders.

Q So -- but your recommendation to us, who you don't have to follow our orders, would be that -- (laughter.)

MR. GIBBS: We'll call you guys the ex officio committee in charge of --

Q But your recommendation -- but you said a minute ago that your recommendation would be against that. Can you elaborate on that?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: What I said was -- you're moving into a hypothetical case. What I said was, given the operations as we understand them now and the lines of effort that are being accomplished by BP, there's no reason to make a change.

Q Why is it taking so long, sir?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: It is very difficult. It's 5,000 feet below the surface, and it's never been done before.

MR. GIBBS: Ed.

Q Admiral, are you saying the federal government is doing everything it can be doing and that BP is not doing?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: No. BP has provided a series of proposed actions to address not only the permanent capping of the well, but how to deal with the leakage in between time. They provide us those lines of effort with Gantt charts, key dates on when they're going to be accomplished. Those are briefed to Secretary Salazar, all the senior leadership. We asked a lot of questions about them and we're following them. That's the reason we are -- and maybe it's a mistake to set a date saying the top kill will be done on Tuesday and now it's going to be Wednesday, because they are sequentially starting to light off these systems and bring pressure down the pipes -- if they find a faulty valve and have to replace it with an ROV, that's maybe 12 or 18 hours added on to it.

The sequence is going as planned as we discussed following the very, very detailed questions that were provided by Secretary Salazar and Secretary Chu a week or so ago.

Q So you're saying that on the permit modification, if I could ask, Ms. Browner, given what's happened, why shouldn't be go back and revisit these modifications?

MS. BROWNER: Well, what the President said is no new holes until we get through the 30-day report. So that's what we're focused on right now. Obviously, this report will be made available later this week, and then we'll have to make a set of decisions about how we proceed going forward. But in terms of the permitting, I think what's important to understand is that we are doing exactly what we said -- is that the people holding permits, they were holding them prior to this accident, are not moving forward with drilling at this point in time.

Q Can I -- just real quick on the series of interventions that the Admiral talked about. Is there no way technologically to have them more in a overlapping series of attempts?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Actually that's a pretty good question -- I asked that same one myself. And I'll give you the best example of why that can't be done. The first time we tried to put the insertion tube in, if you remember, it actually backed out and had to be put in twice. The reason that happened was the ROV that was dealing with the insertion tube became entangled with the ROV that was trying to monitor the subsea dispersants at the leak site. It's what they call sim-ops in the industry -- simultaneous operations.

What you have there right now in a radius of 5,000 feet around that well site is 5,000 feet of crumpled riser pump, an upside-down mobile drilling unit, and on the surface anywhere between 12 and 20 ships, at any one particular time, anywhere between 10 and 14 ROVs operating. Some of these things are going to have to be done in sequence because you can't operate on the same patient at the same time and do three different surgeries.

MR. GIBBS: Major.

Q To put this in terminology that some editorial pages have used, Admiral and Ms. Browner, is it not possible to federalize this? As a matter of law, can you not do that -- number one? And number two, as a matter of practical solution creation, you don't want to do it even if you could?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, I'm working without a net and without a lawyer, but the federal on-scene coordinator has the legal authority to direct a responsible party so I'm sure there's a legal rationale to do it. I'm not sure there's a cause for action or a justification to consider it.

Q Ms. Browner, do you have anything to add? Now, you implied earlier that these conversations about dispersants will be -- do you expect them to be resolved today? Are you expecting a resolution? And do you share some of the concerns that have been expressed to me and others here from environmentalists that the use of these dispersants could be creating a secondary environmental catastrophe that we may not fully understand or comprehend at this moment?

MS. BROWNER: We have the experts talking to each other right now. Let's let them get through today. They will be announcing where they are, whether a decision has been made, or where they are in those discussions this afternoon.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Can I just add a comment there? A decision to use dispersants doesn't do away with the problem. It means we're willing to accept the effect of the oil in the ocean rather on land. It's a tradeoff of where the impact of the oil is going to be made. And by dispersing it, it goes into much smaller pieces and can biodegrade rather quickly. And another thing is, regardless of the relative toxicity of any dispersant, the difference in the toxicity between the dispersants and the oil is in order of magnitude.

Q Admiral, Governor Jindal today asked if you could provide more readily available authority for those in the Coast Guard closest to the scene in parts of Louisiana that he can call or deal with directly. Can you tell us today if those authorities are going to be provided, and if that's a legitimate concern he's raised?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, he raised it and actually Secretary Napolitano raised it over the weekend. What we're going to do is we're going to take a look at those teams that are being deployed and make sure that no matter where they're at, the direction there, there's somebody in a blue suit providing supervision or coordination related to that. And I offered and have deployed an officer to Governor Jindal's staff to be that personal liaison between him, me, Secretary Napolitano or anybody else. So, yes, that's our intent and we're moving there. To the extent that it hasn't been, we will do that.

MR. GIBBS: Scott.

Q Admiral, you've outlined very clearly how complicated this is and why it's taking so long. But looking back on the events surrounding the incident itself, and now we're in this situation where you're pumping mud down, we've heard about maybe stuffing garbage into this hole -- are you exasperated and dismayed that you're in this position? And how, from what you've learned, can you make sure that it doesn't happen again, the wells that are out there already? Are they --

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, I think you ought to be exasperated or dismayed if there's any oil on the water. As I said earlier, it's an insult to the environment.

That said, I believe -- and I wouldn't call it garbage; it's called junk for a reason, but it's a very, very technical issue -- it's pieces of tire that can tolerate certain pressures and temperatures to be able to clog up the blowout preventer.

I'm sorry, go ahead and finish your question.

Q No, it just seems like this is -- obviously you're improvising and the extent of this disaster and looking back on those incidents and what was not in place that could be drawn on now, how do you feel about that? And is this not going to happen again?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Great question. Okay, first of all, there was an assumption that these blowout preventers were failsafe. We know that's not true. Okay? I don't think anybody ever contemplated dealing with the scenario that we have right now where the blowout preventer would fail; you'd have 5,000 feet of riser pipe, and then several leaks in that riser pipe from the residual oil coming out of the blowout preventer that did not close all the way. I think we need to go back and look at our plans to respond and how we're positioned to do this in the future. It just was not contemplated in the planning scenario.

I would say this: When the Oil Pollution Act was passed in 1990, it was only four or five years before that we had really moved into deep-sea drilling. And the Oil Pollution Act was aimed at the problem of the day, which were large tankers. And the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 has generally solved that problem.

But all the things that are in place regarding command and control and technology and so forth, like the use of dispersants and in situ burning that were major breakthroughs approved after the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, now are being done on such a large scale that we had never contemplated that at this point we'd have 600,000 gallons of dispersant had been applied on the surface. I don't think it was ever envisioned when it was first decided let's try these alternate technologies. So we are in a new era. We're going to learn something from this and we're probably going to have to adjust the rules.

Q Are you -- I'm sorry, one more question. I'm from a part of California where 40 years ago there was a huge oil spill. There's still oil pumping out of the sea floor; there's tar balls on the beach every day. Does this ever get entirely shut? Do you ever close this hole?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, I think there are two issues in California, without getting into a lot of detail. They have natural seepage out there that causes tar balls because there is oil that has open access to the subsurface. Right. We can do everything we can with what we control with manmade technology and how we use technology down there. There are going to be from time to time natural seepages of oil.

MR. GIBBS: Let me just add from the President's perspective for this, Scott. As you heard the Admiral say, the President's viewpoint is failsafe has to mean that. And if it doesn't, then we have to examine why it doesn't and the circumstances around that and have that impact our decisions going forward.

In terms of the reviews that the government is looking through to look back at what got us to this point, we have the President's instruction for Secretary Salazar and the Department of Interior to report back to him. That will be Thursday. Thursday, the President will receive that report here at the White House.

There is a separate national engineering report on this incident. And as you know, the President set up an independent commission headed by a former EPA commissioner and a former U.S. senator from Florida that will be charged with looking at both the role of industry and the role of government in regulating industry. And the President I think has been very clear that we should not spare any expense in looking at both of those aspects of what may or may not have caused this.

Q I'm sorry, a question for you and also the Admiral. The President is receiving this report Thursday. Should we expect the President to respond to it immediately in some fashion?

MR. GIBBS: I expect that the President will speak to you all about it and answer some questions about it, yes.

Q Okay, all right. And my question for the Admiral -- the two steps that are in the immediate future -- the top kill and the junk shot -- what do you think the odds of success are for both of them?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, I quote Doug Suttles from BP who said this morning around 60 to 70 percent.

Q You describe sort of a disconnect between the dangers involved in drilling this deep and the sort of conventional means there are of dealing with a spill if it happened. Ms. Browner, was the government aware of that disconnect when they allowed this kind of drilling to proceed, and they let it proceed? Or were they misled by industry as to their capabilities in dealing with a disaster of this kind?

MS. BROWNER: Well, I think -- and the Admiral can also speak to this -- there's not been an accident of this magnitude. These preventers have worked. Now, we need to understand why they didn't work and what we need to do going forward. And as Robert just said, between the DOI report, the National Academy of Engineering, and the commission, the presidential commission, we should be able to get to the bottom of this. And if there are changes that need to be made, they'll be made.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: When I was testifying before the Senate last week, I made three -- I identified three areas where I thought we might want to look at going forward to see if we could do better.

One of them is the overall inspection regulatory regime surrounding blowout preventers. And maybe we can do a mandatory inspection, a regime that is regulated by somebody -- some independent third party like the American Bureau of Shipping would certificate drilling systems. I think that's an area we need to look at.

The second one is on the Coast Guard side. All of our inspection authorities for drilling units offshore are contained in Title 46 of the U.S. code. I'd like to go back -- as the outgoing commandant of the Coast Guard, I recommend to my successor to take a look at fire prevention standards, how we issue certificates of compliance -- this was a vessel registered in the Marshall Islands -- and make sure that there is no disparity between the standards that we're meeting under the international standards issued by the Marshall Islands and our certification of that; or maybe actually hands-on inspection rather than just taking the certificate as proof they're in compliance.

And the third area, the spill response plans that are submitted to the Minerals Management Service as part of the permitting process I think need to be reviewed by the local Coast Guard commanders in terms of these area contingency plans that I mentioned earlier to see that they're better integrated.

Those are the three areas I would give you.

MR. GIBBS: Mara, do you have something?

Q No, go ahead.

Q I have a question if I can go off-topic. Is that okay?

MR. GIBBS: Sure.

Q There are a number of media reports saying that the White House and the Hill are meeting today in support of repealing "don't ask, don't tell." Did those -- at the White House to endorse as Congress potentially takes up that issue this week?

MR. GIBBS: I have not seen -- I've seen some of the reports. I've not seen what exactly is being discussed. Obviously it's likely that Congress is going to act this week. If they decide to do that, we'll certainly examine what those efforts are.

Q If I could just follow up on that really quickly, is it possible that some kind of compromise could be reached that the White House could endorse, and if so, what would the details of this compromise entail?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I would -- let me go find out what they're discussing, and that might be pertinent to that answer.

Q Do you know who initiated the meetings?

MR. GIBBS: I think we did, but I will check.

Q Robert, has this incident influenced your thinking on the wisdom of drilling at 5,000 feet? In other words, the Admiral talked about the difficulty in plugging these holes at this depth. Going forward, what are your -- has this changed your thinking about drilling --

MR. GIBBS: Look, I can say that we have had a number of meetings with the President on this. I do not believe that the President, as frustrated as he is, wants to make a judgment without the investigations that he'll see, again, starting Thursday, with the National Academy of Engineers and ultimately with the commission.

I will say this, Peter. I've heard him say this, I repeated it just a minute ago to Scott and I also heard him say this -- I've heard him say this a number of times: Failsafe has to mean it. As Carol said, we have been fortunate that blowout preventers have worked. We have not been -- we have not dealt with in the Gulf something like this since 1983-1984 off the coast of Mexico. The incident that Scott talked about was even before that, off the coast of California.

So we've been fortunate. We have to ensure that we have not become too trusting of those circumstances around not having had an accident. And that's one of the things specifically that the President wants to be investigated. We have to ensure -- and you've heard him say this -- investigate this relationship between the regulation at the Department of Interior -- and that's why Secretary Salazar has taken the steps to break apart MMS -- and ensure that we have the robust regulatory structure in place.

Q A quick follow-up, and I apologize if you've addressed this before, but the Kentucky Senate candidate on the Republican side has talked about how "accidents happen." Is that the White House's view?

MR. GIBBS: We are actively involved in figuring out how that accident happened, because if how that accident happened doesn't inform how you move forward, whether it's in a mine in West Virginia or a mine in Kentucky, or an oil well off the coast of Louisiana -- if that doesn't inform what you're doing going forward -- I think the American people expect that there's a regulatory structure that's in place that ensures high safety standards and that companies are living up to those standards.

Steve.

Q One for the Admiral. I think you said on April 21st you started moving equipment even before the rig collapsed. Why then are you still having to fly equipment in, I think you said by C-17, from Alaska, this late, a month later?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: That's a great question. It gets back to the statement I made earlier that this is not a monolithic spill. You've got a radius about 200 miles out there, and you have patches of very, very thick oil. As the oil came to the surface, sometimes we were able to treat it with in-situ burning, sometimes mechanical skimming, sometimes dispersant, sometimes the wind changed directions -- so what you have is a number of spills that surfaced and went out omni-directional. There's a general perimeter, and they tend to flow one way, depending on the prevailing wind. But they are very, very spread out.

Because of that, early on we had to take precautions to protect from the central coast of Louisiana clear to Pensacola, Florida. And if you're going to boom that entire area, you put a stress on the system. What we're doing now is redeploying, taking a look at where the areas that are most needed are at, where the enemy is coming to shore basically, if you will, and redeploying and making sure we can move beyond the baseline level of sensitive areas that are identified with these plans and do more.

Q So were you not prepared on April 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th? Were you just not prepared for how big this spill was going to get?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: We were prepared for a catastrophic spill. As we got into the first four or five days, we started fanning out where we thought we had to put boom to the east and the west clear over, as I said, to Pensacola, Florida. Originally, if you look at the plans for a blowout there, generally it's going to cut somewhere around Plackman's Parish, which has been impacted by it as the area you're going to have to defend. But because of the amount of time the oil has been out there, the amount of time the winds have changed -- when the winds come out of the west and start pushing it, or out of the south, we have to start thinking about Mississippi Sound and Alabama. When they come out of the southeast, we have to think about Plackman's Parish. So it's moved -- the direction of movement and the threat has changed on us, and it's required a larger area to be boomed that was contemplated and now we have to redeploy.

MR. GIBBS: Remember, Steve, when we did our original briefing with the President's team -- with Secretary Napolitano before Admiral Allen was announced as the incident coordinator -- we were discussing at that point that oil would soon make landfall. But as the Admiral said, because of wind and water currents, dispersants have broken stuff up. We're just now seeing the larger impacts of this, and because of that, moving resources around.

Q One quick follow. Given the deep-water drilling in the Gulf, shouldn't more of this equipment be based there rather than, say, on the west coast or in Alaska? And will it be permanently located now in the Gulf Coast?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I think a reconciliation of the resources required by the plan will be ultimately employed across a much broader threat area than we'd anticipated, as a natural reconciliation of any inquiry will be part of it.

MR. GIBBS: Even as we have to take into account the environmental impacts of what surrounds it, obviously you're drilling in shallower water in a place like Alaska, but you're dealing with a fundamentally different -- a fundamentally different environment.

John.

Q Thank you, Robert. And thank you, Ms. Browner and Admiral Allen, for being here today. I'd like to ask both of you -- I'm sure you've heard the complaints from the scientific community that it's been a problem operating with 10-year-old maps, and that government should spend the estimated \$11 million it needs to update the environmental sensitivity maps. Do you agree with that complaint?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I'd almost have to defer to Jane Lubchenco. I've been involved in conference calls and press calls where she has raised the issue that resources in the past have constrained their ability to do that mapping. And I think she considers that a priority. But, Carol, would you like to comment?

MS. BROWNER: She said the same thing, and certainly, it's something we're going to look at. We're working with Congress to craft legislation right now. It may be appropriate in that. We also -- there will be a meeting of scientists -- it's now I think scheduled for June 3rd --

ADMIRAL ALLEN: June 3rd.

MS. BROWNER: -- in Louisiana, bringing together scientists both from the government and outside the government to understand what questions we need to be asking as we go forward, and what resources we need to make sure are available.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: That will be a science summit at LSU on the 3rd of June.

Q And who will determine the scientists who are going to be there?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: It's being worked by an interagency team. We're soliciting input right now, just haven't finalized it yet. We're moving very quickly, though, to have it on the 3rd of June. We can make that known to you.

MR. GIBBS: April.

Q What you're saying that this is -- there's no guarantees and this is an accident of a magnitude that you haven't seen before. Is it time to ask BP right now to start paying? Because Congressman --

MR. GIBBS: I'm sorry, ask who to start paying?

Q BP to start paying --

MR. GIBBS: They're paying right now. They are.

Q Well, he's saying -- but he's saying that they need to start now and have big -- pay out the exorbitant amount of money starting now, versus paying smaller amounts throughout time if that's the --

MR. GIBBS: I don't know how much the cleanup has been, but my guess is their accountants would think that that's been exorbitant and that's being paid as we speak.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: There have been multimillion-dollar grants made to all the states that are impacted, as well.

Q Because he's saying he --

Q I have a question --

Q Wait a minute, I have a follow-up. He's saying it's going to get worse before it gets better, much, much worse.

MR. GIBBS: Undoubtedly.

Q Is that the case?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Yes, some of these grants have been advanced by BP knowing that there's a much larger -- they're partial claims, knowing that there will be more due later one.

Q When is the President expected to go to the Gulf Coast to make an assessment himself? And also who from the White House is on the ground with you, Admiral Allen?

MR. GIBBS: Well, I would say this. As you heard, there's a federal on-scene coordinator, Rear Admiral Landry, in Robert, Louisiana, which is where the President visited on his trip a few weeks ago. This afternoon, as we speak, Secretary Salazar, Secretary Napolitano and Administrator Jackson are in the area and may be CEQ Director Sutley -- I will double-check -- is that right? And I think people will go in and out of the region.

As I started this by saying, were it not for change of commands, Admiral Allen would be speaking to us via speaker phone from Louisiana itself.

Q So when is the President going?

MR. GIBBS: If there are changes to that schedule, we'll let you know.

Q Then you're anticipating --

MS. BROWNER: Let me just add one other thing. There is a daily conference call. Every evening, the Admiral, myself, John Brennan, Secretary Napolitano, Salazar, Jackson -- every night we're on the phone.

MR. GIBBS: And the call that was done today with the President with the governors of the states is done on a daily basis through the Office of Public Engagement. Admiral Allen is generally on that call and speaking with the five governors so that if there are points of cause and concern, they are brought directly here on that call.

Q Do you have a readout from that call?

MR. GIBBS: We will have that, yes.

Q So is there an expectation at some point that the President will go?

MR. GIBBS: He might, he might, yes.

Let me go to Tommy because we're -- let me work the back of the room here.

Q Thanks, Robert. First of all, are you going to brief on other topics after this or is this --

MR. GIBBS: If you've got a question on another topic, I'm happy to shoot.

Q All right, I have three questions then.

MR. GIBBS: Just three? Why don't we pick our most important and we'll see if there's other topics on oil that -- while we have these guys here.

Q Well, I have one on oil. Can I do one on oil and one not on oil?

Q Just do it.

MR. GIBBS: Yes.

Q Admiral Allen --

MR. GIBBS: Does that count as one of your questions? (Laughter.)

Q Admiral Allen, you said earlier that if the -- if you guys issue an administrative order it has the effect of law. And my question is, what penalties does BP face if they either don't comply with that administrative order if they comply too slowly?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I can go and get you the actual cites. I'm not sure I have them top of my head right now, but I'm sure there are both civil and criminal penalties that could be invoked. We can get that information to you.

Q And, Robert, over the weekend in responding to Sarah Palin on the subject of the oil spill, she said that -- she asserted that the White House had been slow in responding and made the assertion it was because of campaign donations, and you said that she needed to become more well-informed. But this is I think the third time someone -- or fourth time someone on FOX News has made a similar assertion. Do you think at this point the problem is a lack of information or something else?

MR. GIBBS: A lack of information on what?

Q On the response of the oil spill. She's saying that --

MR. GIBBS: I will say this. Every day for almost a month, we have sent out to each one of you all from the Joint Information Center exactly what is done each day on the response. I think it's -- I think if you hear Admiral Allen

speak for about 30 seconds you realize the Coast Guard and the federal government have been there since this accident happened, since that rig exploded and caught fire on April 20th. I think there's a lack of information if you believe somehow that that response didn't begin at the very point of this accident.

Q I mean, there's -- what do you think though is behind the continued assertions that there was some nefarious purpose and that you delayed and there was --

MR. GIBBS: Look, I've heard people on -- I've heard people say -- not want to offer conspiracy theories but say somehow that we've delayed our response for whatever reason. There have been notions made by people that even this was done intentionally. You know, again, I -- you got to have a license to drive a car in this country but regrettably you can get on a TV show and say virtually anything.

Sam.

Q Two questions. One is, you put out a --

Q You want to license pundits? (Laughter.)

Q Regulate them.

MR. GIBBS: Yes. (Laughter.) Speaking of blowout preventers. (Laughter.) Go ahead, Sam.

Q Thank you. Two questions. One is, you put out a fairly harsh statement towards the end of last week about Republican senators holding up this raising of the liability cap. I'm wondering what the White House has done at all to actually move that legislation on the Hill, other than the statement.

MR. GIBBS: Let me check with -- do you have something?

MS. BROWNER: We will actually -- yes, we have been working with Congress and we will actually have three administration officials testifying tomorrow morning before the Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee.

MR. GIBBS: Let me see if there's any additional calls that Legislative Affairs have made on that.

Q Okay. And then the second question is, going back to offshore drilling in the future, I guess I'm just sort of shocked -- you said that the President has to wait until the investigation comes back before deciding how he's going to approach this issue in the future. Isn't there enough empirical evidence right now that you have seen or that he has seen to make him at least second-guess or look at his decision to do offshore drilling in the first place?

MR. GIBBS: Well, obviously there's been enough evidence for him to look at it. That's why he asked the Department of Interior to conduct what they've done while the engineers are doing their stuff and while, to ensure the independence of any review that's done, we've appointed an independent commission to do that.

Sam, understand a couple of things: 30 percent of our domestic oil production comes from the Gulf. We've talked here about the fact that for many years we've had the luxury of not having any accidents. We need to figure out why -- after all those years, why did this accident happen. And that should, and will, inform what we do moving forward.

Q The mindset hasn't changed in the slightest at all?

MR. GIBBS: I can't imagine that that hypothetical statement would be backed up by anything I've said in the last three weeks.

Sam.

Q Just quickly on Korea. Can you give us a sense of any updates or conversations the President has had today?

MR. GIBBS: Well, the President spoke -- obviously has had his intelligence briefing and spoken with the national security team; he spoke with President Lee last week; obviously, the statement that we put out very early in the morning after President Lee spoke to South Korea. We believe that North Korea should stop its belligerent and threatening behavior. We support President Lee's actions. Secretary Clinton will be traveling to the region and see President Lee very shortly.

Q Has the President spoken with Secretary Clinton while she's traveling in China?

MR. GIBBS: Not that I'm aware of, no.

Yes, sir.

Q Thank you. I'm from Germany, and all the world is observing how the U.S. is handling the spill. Admiral, do you see any country out there which has a higher expertise on deep-water drilling that could be of any help? And the

other side of this question is, if there is no other country, that means also no other country takes the risks of offshore deep-water drilling in the same sense as the U.S. is doing?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, I want to address the policy issues associated with deep-water drilling. A couple of things we have done: I've asked my staff to take a look at the other regulatory regimes around the country -- around the world and how certain countries treat the regulation and inspection of blowout preventers and drilling systems. The other thing we're taking a look at is there is an international body very similar to the International Civil Aviation Organization -- it's called IMO, the International Maritime Organization. We are a signatory to that convention. They establish international standards for a lot of different things including drilling systems.

And we're going to go back and compare the U.S. domestic inspection regime with the regimes of other countries -- let's say the Marshall Islands -- and in some cases, compare that to international standards that are out there, and see if there's any kind of re-leveling that needs to be done.

I'm aware of this anecdotally, so I don't want to say with absolute certainty, but I do -- I'm under the impression that Norway actually has a regulatory system for blowout preventers. So we would look at things like that.

MR. GIBBS: Thank you, guys. Thank you.

Q But he's asking whether you're actually consulting with them to try to plug the hole --

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Oh, I'm sorry --

Q -- with other countries that have expertise.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: We're bringing all expertise to bear. Yes, we are. I would have to go back and check exactly who has been at the table. But we'll give you that answer.

Q How do you like retirement? (Laughter.)

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I'll let you know when --

MR. GIBBS: Go ahead.

Q One question -- a lot of people have been saying that the administration has not been tough enough on BP. I'll give you two examples: the fact that the EPA order was ignored --

MR. GIBBS: No, no, no. Understand, Jake, just go back and read the letter. There is a time period I think of 72 hours to go through this -- these guys are -- they're meeting -- they were meeting late last night, and will I believe in about -- my watch is set about five minutes fast, so in about 10 minutes Administrator Jackson --

Q There was also --

MR. GIBBS: What's that --

Q There's also the live feed that didn't come until 10 days after you guys initially requested it. Obviously, not everything you've asked for they've done. And what do you say to -- even supporters of the President say you guys have not been tough enough on BP?

MR. GIBBS: Well, again, Admiral Allen can tell the story of -- or he told the story of speaking with the CEO of BP, if he believes something needs to happen, and that that behavior is changed. And we'll continue to do that.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Maybe a good example -- we've got a group set up called the flow rate technical group. There have been a lot of issues about 1,000, 5,000 barrels. Frankly, from the start we responded much higher than that, so it wasn't consequential to the response. It is going to be very consequential to the total amount of oil we think is out there in terms of natural resources damage -- damage assessments and mitigation. For that reason we've stood up a team. It's headed by Marcia McNutt, who is the head of the U.S. Geological Survey. And they are putting together the best estimate from satellite imagery, over-flights, looking at the video imagery that's available from BP -- and it's only two-dimensional. We're trying to actually figure how many frames per second we're actually looking at so we can try to establish the density of the flow at any one time and differentiate gases from the other hydrocarbons.

That's all being worked right now, and what we're going to come up with -- it will probably be a range of some assumptions attached to it of what we believe to be the best government estimate of not only the flow rate, but the total amount of oil that's been released to date.

Q Are you tough enough with BP?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: When we need information from that group, we've asked for it and they've delivered.

MR. GIBBS: Thank you, guys.

Q Have you reflected on the fact that --

MR. GIBBS: The flow rate -- just let me --

Q Finish flow rate --

MR. GIBBS: I think sometime this week. Again, as was said on the call with the President, they're going -- they're looking at the actual flow rate, they're looking at average flow rates, they're looking at total volume of oil spilled. Again, what the Admiral talked about is initial estimates were based off of -- over satellite photos and over-flight photos that are obviously one-dimensional. The video is in many ways one-dimensional.

So the best and the brightest, headed by Marsha McNutt, the director of the U.S. Geological Survey, with a team of scientists are the flow rate technical group that are finding out many of the answers to that rate, understanding that there are a lot of things that are involved in, once a flow rate is determined -- as you heard the Admiral say, it's, quite frankly, less to do with response but it does impact ultimately on the penalties that the company provides.

Thank you.

Q Admiral, have you used your veto against BP? You said you had veto power.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Not for a veto yet, though.

Q Have you met with the President today?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: No, not today.

END

4:22 P.M. EDT

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