

Worries mount as oil spill heads toward Atlantic

What happened

With oil continuing to gush at an unknown rate into the Gulf of Mexico, BP this week reported its first partial success in slowing the spill from the Deepwater Horizon rig that exploded more than three weeks ago. BP said a mile-long pipe was siphoning 2,000 barrels of oil a day from the wellhead, which it said was leaking at a rate of 5,000 barrels a day. But some scientists disputed BP's estimate of the leak's size, saying it could be 10 times as large. New data indicated that oil was starting to be drawn into a current leading to the Atlantic, threatening vast additional stretches of coast, including the Florida Keys. The Environmental Protection Agency extended its ban on gulf fishing to an area of 45,000 square miles, 20 percent of the gulf's total area. Some of the gushed oil was suspended, underwater, in plumes as big as 10 miles long, three miles wide, and 300 feet thick. "There's a shocking amount of oil in the deep water, relative to what you see in the surface water," said University of Georgia researcher Samantha Joye.



Oil in the Gulf: Florida may be next.

In congressional hearings, Energy Secretary Ken Salazar admitted that the federal government was not prepared for such a massive spill and that he had not rooted out all the "bad apples" in his department's Minerals and Management Service, which oversees drilling. The administration also announced it would form an independent commission to study the cause of the spill and the cleanup effort. BP, rig owner Transocean, and cement contractor Halliburton publicly blamed one another, a performance President Obama called a "ridiculous spectacle."

What the editorials said

The truly ridiculous spectacle is that of Obama trying to dodge blame, said *Investor's Business Daily*. The botched cleanup operation is a clear failure of "federal responsibility." So-called fire booms, designed to contain oil in the first hours of a spill, have been available for years, but the administration delayed acquiring them until "it was too late." It's easy to "scapegoat oil executives," but "why was it only oil executives in the dock?"

"There's plenty of blame to go around," said *The Sacramento Bee*. But ultimately, "it's our insatiable thirst for oil that is driving oil exploration" into areas that are harder to reach and "more ecologically sensitive." With oil now gushing at a rate that could make the *Exxon Valdez* disaster seem mild, do we need any more proof that "oil is a dirty addiction that we must kick?"

What the columnists said

No we don't, said Thomas Friedman in *The New York Times*, but we do need Obama's leadership, and that's been sorely lacking.

The horrific spill offers Obama a historic opportunity to "energize the country to do something really important and lasting that is too hard to do in normal times." But just as President Bush squandered 9/11 by not calling upon a unified nation to make sacrifices to reduce our oil addiction once and for all, Obama "is squandering his environmental 9/11." He could start with a full-throated call for fees on carbon emissions and a full halt to offshore drilling, but he's just too "timid."

The rush to legislate is entirely predictable—and wrongheaded, said Jerry Taylor and Peter Van Doren in the *Los Angeles Times*. "We don't know how exactly this happened or exactly who is at fault," and until we do, legislative and regulatory fixes could do more harm than good. Besides, the market is doing a quicker job of punishing BP than any Washington bureaucrat ever could. Since the Deepwater Horizon exploded, BP has lost 19 percent of its stock market value. That's a powerful lesson for any other company that contemplates "under-investing in safety."

The only lesson we've learned so far is just how unpredictable—and potentially devastating—an offshore oil spill can be, said Christine Dell'Amore in *National Geographic*. The repair operations now being undertaken have never before been attempted in "an extreme deep-sea environment," and nobody can say with any confidence that they'll succeed. If they don't, "the underground reservoir may continue bleeding until it's dry." This gusher could end up "poisoning coastal habitats for decades."

THE WEEK

It's not just Arizona. When it comes to illegal immigration, the nation is in a foul mood. A large majority of Americans now tell pollsters they favor an Arizona-style crackdown in their own states, including

the requirement that immigrants carry their papers at all times or face arrest. Indeed, with Congress stuck in its usual paralysis, many states have been busy enacting their own plans to dissuade illegal immigration, from establishing workplace identification systems to denying driver's licenses to people who can't prove their legal status. In the first quarter of 2010 alone, state and local governments enacted more than 100 immigration laws. Ten state legislatures are debating "English-only" statutes mandating that official business be conducted in the mother tongue.

But then, it's getting harder to say what the mother tongue is. One in eight Americans is now foreign born, while nearly a quarter of those under 18 have at least one immigrant parent, according to a Brookings Institution preview of the 2010 Census. Nearly 85 percent of our population growth over the past decade came from non-whites, with Latinos registering the largest spike. In short, America is changing, and immigrants are in the forefront—which shouldn't be all that shocking, considering that's been the American story from the beginning. Of course, so have eruptions of immigrant bashing. I'm reminded of my grandfather, a Russian immigrant who was never able to shake his own "foreign" accent. In his later years, he'd complain about how Cuban immigrants—he called them "those damn Cubanskis"—were "taking over" his Miami Beach neighborhood. We're a nation of immigrants, but we got here first.

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