

Today we celebrate the 41st Earth Day. We also mark one year since the Deepwater Horizon oil rig sank to bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. On April 20, 2010, the platform exploded, killing 11 workers. The rig disappeared beneath the water's surface two days later, but for 87 days more than 4 million barrels of oil spewed from the blown-out Macondo well, coating nearly 1,000 miles of Gulf coastline and temporarily closing over 88,000 square miles of some of the nation's most productive fishing grounds. A repeat incident in the Gulf of Mexico would cripple the region's still-devastated economy. An accident off of the U.S. East Coast would endanger over 200,000 jobs and \$12 billion associated with New Jersey's fishing and tourism industries -- and that is not even counting the indirect effects as this money flows through our local economies. Yet legislation currently making its way through Congress would increase the likelihood of future oil spills in both regions by accelerating offshore drilling without proper safety and environmental reviews.

Last week, the House Committee on Natural Resources advanced three offshore drilling bills that the Republican leadership has indicated will receive votes on the House floor in early May. The first of these bills would impose artificial and arbitrary deadlines on the Department of Interior to approve permits to drill -- even if safety and environmental reviews are unfinished. The second would force the Interior Department to rush into leasing new oil and gas tracts in the Gulf of Mexico without updating the inadequate environmental reviews conducted prior to the Deepwater Horizon disaster, and it would mandate a lease sale off the coast of Virginia -- a mere 90 miles from the coast of New Jersey. The third bill would go even further and open up massive new swaths the East and West Coasts to drilling, including all of California as well as the mid- and North-Atlantic coasts.

The justification offered for this reckless action is the false claim that it will lower gas prices for American consumers. This pretense must be dispensed with once and for all. Last year, U.S. crude oil production was higher than in any year since 2003. What affect has all that production had on our gas prices at the pump? Right now, we are seeing gas prices approaching the highs we saw in 2008. According the Energy Information Administration (EIA), U.S. production will remain above the 2009, pre-Gulf spill levels through 2035 without the proposed accelerated drilling. Moreover, EIA reports that unlimited access to U.S. Outer Continental Shelf resources would have zero impact on gas prices through 2020 and decrease prices at the pump by a mere three cents in 2030. The hard fact is that the United States possesses two percent of the world's proved oil reserves, and we consume 25 percent of the world's oil. We cannot drill our way to lower prices at the pump. The math simply does not work. "Drill, baby, drill" may be a nice slogan for the oil companies, but it does little to help average Americans buying gasoline.

The real causes of higher gas prices are the slow recovery of the global economy, uncertainty

about the unrest in the Middle East and North Africa, and an all-time high in energy market speculation, according to the Commodity Futures Trading Commission. In addition, a March study from the Department of Interior found that oil companies have nearly 80 million acres of public land under lease onshore and offshore, but they are only producing oil on 18.5 million acres. In the Gulf of Mexico, oil companies hold the drilling rights to 34 million acres but are producing oil on just more than 6 million acres. The 28 million nonproducing acres contain more natural gas and nearly as much oil as we could ever get from drilling up and down the East and West coasts. Instead of providing more giveaways to Big Oil, we should be addressing market manipulation, focusing our efforts on sustainable energy production and serious improvements to energy efficiency, and holding oil companies accountable for the safe and responsible development of public lands already under lease.

Democrats in Congress have put forward concrete proposals to achieve these objectives. The Federal Price Gouging Prevention Act would stop sellers from radically increasing the price of gas without justification during a time of international crisis affecting oil markets, but the Republicans have blocked a vote on the bill. The Democratic budget alternative makes robust, sustainable investments in research and development to improve our energy security even as the Republican proposal cuts these vital programs. My Democratic colleagues and I have offered bills to implement the safety recommendations of the National Commission on the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and to establish a fee on inactive leases as an incentive for oil companies to begin producing on the lands they already hold -- of course, applying up-to-date environmental and safety lessons. I also introduced the Big Oil Bailout Prevention Act to make sure that oil companies pay the full cost of damages resulting from future oil spills.

The Deepwater Horizon blowout was not just a freak occurrence. It was an accident waiting to happen. The Oil Spill Commission pointed out that prior to the Deepwater Horizon incident oil rig fatalities in U.S. waters were four times higher than in European waters, even though many of the same companies operate in both locations. The Gulf of Mexico workforce has suffered 1,550 injuries, 60 deaths, and 948 fires and explosions since 2001. Between 1996 and 2009, there were 79 reported losses of well control in the Gulf. Last month, we learned that blowout preventers, designed to be the final fail safe against well disastrous spills, may not be able to prevent some blowouts at all. The total cost of last year's spill to the Gulf economy and resources is still unknown.

The Deepwater Horizon tragedy was a wake-up call, but some of my colleagues seem to have missed the sound of the alarm. The Republican offshore drilling bills were written as if the Deepwater Horizon disaster never occurred. They would make offshore drilling less safe, not more safe. We owe the families of those killed one year ago a serious examination of the lessons learned in order to ensure that the ongoing drilling in the Gulf is as safe as possible. We owe the families and workers who depend on the coastal resources of New Jersey and

elsewhere a promise that a similar accident will never take place off of their shores. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill was the largest in U.S. waters. This Earth Day we should vow to make it the last.