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SCHAKOWSKY demands answers from British petroleum in wake of worst oil spill in history

WASHINGTON, DC-U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), a Chief Deputy Democratic Whip, today demanded answers from BP executives and Administration officials about BP's lack of adequate safety measures which led to the worst oil spill in the history of the North Slope at Prudhoe Bay, Alaska. During a hearing of the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Schakowsky said it was irresponsible and inexcusable that the company refused to conduct proper pipeline inspections for over a decade while making record profits.

Schakowsky's complete statement follows:

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking member Stupak for convening today's oversight hearing into BP's Pipeline oil spills at Prudhoe Bay in Alaska. This is an important issue with major consequences.

"I am glad we are taking the time today to closely review what's gone on at Prudhoe Bay over the last several years. However, what is obvious to me, to my constituents, and to any reasonable person reviewing the facts of this case is that BP, a company that raked in over \$7 billion in profits in the second quarter of this year alone, neglected to conduct even remotely adequate or responsible maintenance on its operating lines on the Greater Prudhoe Bay field. Aside from environmental stewardship obligations, it seems like plain commonsense to me that a company extracting oil as a means of profit would want to routinely conduct thorough inspections of its pipelines to ensure safe transport of the product. Why BP refused to do for years is something I want to know.

"BP had been presented troubling indicators of diminishing product quality in previous years, and conducted no major investigative or corrective action. And despite discovering a leak on its Western pipeline on March 2 of this year, which put over

200, 000 gallons of oil into the Alaskan tundra and was the single largest leak in history on the North Slope, BP attempted to get out of conducting further review of its lines, as had been ordered by the Department of Transportation on March 15.

"Instead of doing the right thing, and what would have been smart business, and conduct an immediate internal investigation of all its lines, BP waited until June 6, then asked for relief and a pass on the DOT's previous "pigging" order, to conduct a thorough internal review of its lines.

"It was not until late July, almost 5 months after the enormous leak was discovered and after it was further ordered by DOT, that BP finally conducted internal testing. The results demonstrated numerous areas of concern and yet another leak. Finally, On August 6, more than 5 months after the initial March 2 leak was discovered, BP shut down production from its Greater Prudhoe Bay field.

"It is astonishing and infuriating that any company trusted by the public and the government to ensure a level of safety for our environment and its use of natural resources to turn a profit, would be so irresponsible.

"But it is truly beyond comprehension that a company that is so grossly profitable would willfully avoid routine, detailed inspections and maintenance on its pipelines. BP, as it turns out, had not taken in depth internal looks at its pipelines using "pigs" on its Eastern lines since 1992 and its Western line since 1998. That's fourteen and 8 years respectively. If this company had spent as much on inspections, safety and maintenance as it does on advertising and lobbying for tax cuts, none of us would have to be here today. BP executives could be counting their bonuses and the public would be assured of the company's pipeline integrity.

"Instead, BP chose to bury its head in the sand and tundra and to operate a see-no-evil approach to its Prudhoe Bay operations. This company has a lot of explaining to do. And, as lawmakers on this committee, we all need to ask ourselves if our policies are adequate, if we can afford to trust companies like BP to do the right thing and if we can continue to rely so heavily on energy products that present such risks to our environment, our bank accounts, and our economy.

"I want to mention that my friend from Chicago, a national leader, Reverend Jesse Jackson, was here in the audience today. His organization has taken a strong interest in this issue and has been raising important questions that consumers want answered.

Most importantly, why BP can make such huge profits while refusing to conduct adequate safety protocols and why its customers are paying such high prices? Reverend Jackson's organization has conducted actions on this issue across the country and I appreciate his leadership.

"Again, Mr. Chairman, I welcome our witnesses and look forward to their testimony."