

Gulf Oil Leak Far Worse Than Reported

OVER THE GULF OF MEXICO (AP) — A blanket of fog lifts, exposing a band of rainbow sheen that stretches for miles off the coast of Louisiana. From the vantage point of an airplane, it's easy to see gas bubbles in the slick that mark the spot where an oil platform toppled during a 2004 hurricane, triggering what might be the longest-running commercial oil spill ever to pollute the Gulf of Mexico.

Yet more than a decade after crude started leaking at the site formerly operated by Taylor Energy Company, few people even know of its existence. The company has downplayed the leak's extent and environmental impact, likening it to scores of minor spills and natural seeps the Gulf routinely absorbs.

An Associated Press investigation has revealed evidence that the spill is far worse than what Taylor — or the government — have publicly reported during their secretive, and costly, effort to halt the leak. Presented with AP's findings, that the sheen recently averaged about 91 gallons of oil per day across eight square miles, the Coast Guard provided a new leak estimate that is about 20 times greater than one recently touted by the company.

Outside experts say the spill could be even worse — possibly one of the largest ever in the Gulf.

Taylor's oil was befouling the Gulf for years in obscurity before BP's massive spill in mile-deep water outraged the nation in 2010. Even industry experts haven't heard of Taylor's slow-motion spill, which has been leaking like a steady trickle from a faucet, compared to the fire hose that was BP's gusher.

Vatican Ends Crackdown On Nun Group

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican has unexpectedly ended its controversial overhaul of the main umbrella group of U.S. nuns, cementing a shift in tone and treatment of the U.S. sisters under the social justice-minded Pope Francis.

The Vatican said Thursday it had accepted a final report on its investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and declared the "implementation of the mandate has been accomplished" nearly two years ahead of schedule. The umbrella group for women's religious orders had been accused of straying from church teaching.

The brief report stated the organization would have to ensure its publications have a "sound doctrinal foundation," and said steps were being taken for "safeguarding the theological integrity" of programs. But no major changes were announced and the direct Vatican oversight that the sisters considered a threat to their mission was over.

"I think there are still some questions about how this is going to play out, but that it concluded early was an overwhelming affirmation of what the sisters do," said Natalia Imperatori-Lee, a religious studies professor at Manhattan College.

The report's tone stood in stark contrast to the 2012 Vatican reform mandate, which said the nuns' group was in a "grave" doctrinal crisis. Vatican officials said the Leadership Conference had over-emphasized social justice issues when they should have also been fighting abortion, had undermined church teaching on homosexuality and the priesthood, and had promoted "radical feminist" themes in their publications and choice of speakers. The nuns' group called the allegations "flawed." But Archbishop Peter Sartain of Seattle was appointed to conduct a top to bottom overhaul of the conference.

Putin: Russian Economy Is Recovering

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia has weathered the worst of its economic troubles and is on the road to recovery, President Vladimir Putin said Thursday during a marathon call-in TV show, offering to normalize ties with the West if it treats Moscow as an equal partner and not a "vassal."

He also defended the delivery of a long-range air defense missile system to Iran, casting it as a reward for Tehran's flexibility in nuclear talks and vowing to continue working with global partners to reach a definitive solution to the country's contested nuclear program.

Putin mixed promises with stern warnings and some humor during the carefully choreographed four-hour national broadcast, an annual affair intended to burnish his father-of-the-nation image and secure his control over the Russian political scene.

His main message was that the gravest challenges are over and the slumping economy will be back on track soon.

He also made it clear that Russia wants an end to fighting in eastern Ukraine and is interested in rebuilding damaged ties with the United States and other Western nations. The U.S. and the European Union imposed sanctions on Russia over Moscow's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and accusations of supporting separatists in Ukraine.

Jeb Bush: '16 Decision Coming Soon

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Jeb Bush said Thursday he will make up his mind "in relatively short order" whether to seek the Republican nomination for president in 2016.

The former Florida governor is going to New Hampshire to attend events called Politics and Pies in Concord on Thursday and Politics and Eggs in Manchester on Friday. He'll also speak at a GOP meeting Friday in Nashua with many potential rivals.

"Typical day in New Hampshire, apparently," Bush told reporters earlier Thursday in Mississippi, where he attended a bill signing ceremony with Republican Gov. Phil Bryant.

Bush said he's not concerned that several other hopefuls are ahead of him in launching their campaigns.

"I'm on a journey to kind of measure support," Bush said. "Other people's processes are not really that relevant to me. I'll make up my mind in relatively short order. I'm excited about just the possibility of being in a position to consider it."

Obama Can Ease Sanctions On His Own

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even if Congress rejects his final Iranian nuclear deal, President Barack Obama could use his executive pen to offer Tehran a hefty portion of sanctions relief on his own.

Lawmakers have insisted on having a say on what could be a historic accord that the U.S. and five other nations are trying to finalize with Iran. The aim is to prevent the Islamic state from developing nuclear weapons, while in return Iran would get a break from U.S., European and U.N. sanctions that are choking its economy.

Negotiators are working to complete a final deal by the end of June. Talks will resume next week in Vienna, it was announced Thursday.

In the meantime, legislation is expected to pass both the Senate and House that would block Obama from using his current authority to waive congressional sanctions against Iran for at least 30 days after any final agreement, to give lawmakers time to weigh in.

However, even if Congress rejected a final agreement, Obama could take unilateral actions that — when coupled with European and U.N. sanctions relief — would allow a deal with Tehran to be implemented.

Thousands Flee As IS Group Advances

BAGHDAD (AP) — More than 2,000 families have fled the Iraqi city of Ramadi with little more than the clothes on their backs, officials said Thursday, as the Islamic State group closed in on the capital of western Anbar province, clashing with Iraqi troops and turning it into a ghost town.

The extremist group, which has controlled the nearby city of Fallujah for more than a year, captured three villages on Ramadi's eastern outskirts on Wednesday. The advance is widely seen as a counteroffensive after the Islamic State group lost the city of Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's hometown, earlier this month.

Hundreds of U.S. troops are training Iraqi forces at a military base west of Ramadi, but a U.S. military official said the fighting had no impact on the U.S. soldiers there, and that there were no plans to withdraw them.

The fleeing Ramadi residents were settling in the southern and western suburbs of Baghdad, and tents, food and other aid were being sent to them, said Sattar Nowruz, an official of the Ministry of Migration and the Displaced.

The ministry was assessing the situation with the provincial government in order "to provide the displaced people, who are undergoing difficult conditions, with better services and help," Nowruz said.

Al-Qaida Consolidates Hold Of Yemen Province Amid Chaos

BY AHMED AL-HAJ
AND SARAH EL DEEB

Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen — Al-Qaida's branch in Yemen consolidated control over much of the country's largest province on Thursday, capturing a major airport, an oil terminal and the area's main military base, and striking an alliance with local tribal leaders to administer the region.

The gains highlight how al-Qaida has exploited the chaos in Yemen, where Shiite rebels are battling forces loyal to exiled President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. A 3-week-old Saudi-led air campaign in support of Hadi has so far failed to halt the rebels' advance.

Military officials and residents said al-Qaida fighters clashed briefly with members of one of Yemen's largest brigades outside Mukalla, the capital of Hadramawt province, which the militants overran earlier this month. The militants then seized control of Riyan airport and moved to secure their hold on the city's main seaport, which is also an oil terminal.

The security officials, speaking from Sanaa on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the press, said the leaders of the brigade in charge of protecting the entire area fled.

Nasser Baqazouz, an activist in the city, said the troops guarding the airport put up little resistance to al-Qaida fighters. "They are consolidating their hold of the city and will paralyze the whole coast of Hadramawt," he said.

Since March 26, the Saudi-led coalition has been striking the Shiite rebels, known as Houthis, and allied military units loyal to ousted President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

But the strikes have not targeted areas with an



al-Qaida presence, including Hadramawt province, where al-Qaida has long maintained a presence despite U.S. drone strikes and Yemeni counterterrorism operations.

A spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition, Ahmed Asiri, said the air campaign is against the Shiite rebels' power grab — not al-Qaida.

"The goals of the (operation) are clear, which is to support the legitimacy of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, support efforts to restore peace and stability and prevent the Houthi militia from harming Yemenis and neighboring countries," Asiri told journalists in Riyadh.

Fighting al-Qaida requires different strategies than that of the current operation, Asiri said, suggesting that such a fight could come later.

"Once there is a secure and stable Yemen that is able to impose order, there will be no room for al-Qaida," he told the Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath TV station.

Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, as the Yemeni affiliate is known, is widely seen as the global network's most dangerous franchise and has been linked to several failed attacks on the U.S. The group claimed responsibility for the attack on a French satirical magazine in Paris earlier this year.

The al-Qaida affiliate has strengthened its hold on Mukalla, negotiating the formation of a 51-member local council to act as nominal administrators of the provincial capital, a local politician, Ali al-Kathiri told The Associated Press.

He said local tribal leaders approved the council only to avoid bloodshed and that non-religious parties like his were kept out of the council.

"This is dangerous. We know what their orientation is," al-Kathiri said, adding that the council negotiated with local commanders of the military base in Mukalla to ensure a peaceful handover of their bases.

Baqazouz, the local activist, said control of the bases means the militants now have free rein over the long Hadramawt coast, which stretches along the Arabian Sea in the east.

In Mukalla, al-Qaida fighters have turned a cultural center into an Islamic religious court and set up squads to keep law and order, according to Baqazouz and al-Kathiri. The squads have arrested several local politicians loyal to Saleh, they said.

Meanwhile, Yemen's exiled vice president, Khaled Bahah, called on the Houthis and pro-Saleh military units to end their offensive on the southern port city of Aden, saying that ground fighting must halt ahead of any peace initiative.

Speaking in Riyadh, Bahah said the rebels and Saleh loyalists should adhere to the U.N. Security Council resolution passed earlier this week that calls on Yemen's rivals to end the violence and return to U.N.-led peace talks. He called on military units loyal to Saleh to return to the fold of the legitimate government.

The U.N. resolution makes no mention of an end to the airstrikes.

"We consider Aden to be the key to peace, the key to the solution," Bahah said of the port city, Yemen's second-largest, where Hadi had set up a temporary capital before fleeing to Saudi Arabia.

Bahah said Hadi will return to Aden when the security and political situation improves. For now, he said a small government will operate out of Riyadh, focusing on organizing and coordinating humanitarian efforts.

The Houthis swept down from their northern strongholds and seized the capital, Sanaa, in September. Iran supports the Shiite rebels, but both Tehran and the rebels deny it has armed them.

Meanwhile, Saleh troops and Houthi fighters made new gains in Taiz, north of Aden, encircling the command center of a major brigade loyal to Hadi amid heavy clashes.

Asiri, the coalition spokesman, said the air campaign has left the Houthi rebels in disarray and severed their contacts and alliance with the Saleh military units. He said fighting units on the ground are isolated from their leaders and targeting their weapons depots has limited their capabilities.

Ground fighting has been fiercest in Aden, where rebels and pro-Saleh military units are trying to take control of the city.

Humanitarian groups have struggled to meet the needs of a population that was already struggling with food security, water scarcity and fuel shortages.

The U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said that at least 364 civilians are reported to have been killed since the start of the airstrikes on March 26, including at least 84 children and 25 women. This is in addition to hundreds of fighters killed.

A Ride To The White House



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/TNS
U.S. President Barack Obama, right, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald, left, and Vice President Joe Biden, center, welcome veterans participating in the Wounded Warrior Project's Soldier Ride to the White House in celebration of the eighth annual Soldier Ride in Washington, D.C.

Guam Governor Urged To Allow Same-Sex Marriage

BY GRACE GARCES BORDALLO
AND CALEB JONES

Associated Press

HAGATNA, Guam — The nation's largest gay rights organization and Guam's biggest newspaper are blasting the territory's governor for not allowing marriage licenses to be issued to same-sex couples.

Guam's attorney general on Tuesday said state officials should begin issuing licenses after a lesbian couple filed a federal lawsuit because they were denied a marriage application. But state officials, backed by the governor, refused the attorney general's directive because it wasn't a binding legal opinion. Gov. Eddie Baza Calvo said lawmakers or the public could change the law to allow same-sex marriage, if that was their will.

James Perez Servino, an associate director of the Human Rights Campaign, issued a statement on the group's website saying Calvo is "standing in the way of marriage equality." He encouraged people to send messages to the governor's office expressing their support for same-sex marriage.

"Gov. Eddie Calvo needs to

retake civics after he passed the buck on the attorney general's legal memorandum on gay marriage to lawmakers and voters," an editorial in Friday's *Pacific Daily News* says. "Calvo could have made the courageous decision to end discrimination against homosexuals in Guam."

"The governor's duty is to enforce our laws, not interpret them," the editorial says.

Calvo, who is traveling, didn't return messages seeking comment to The Associated Press.

Attorney General Elizabeth Barrett-Anderson on Tuesday directed officials to immediately begin processing same-sex marriage applications, which would have made Guam the first U.S. territory to recognize same-sex marriage. Loretta M. Pangelinan and Kathleen M. Agüero, both 28, said they are challenging "the discriminatory denial of their freedom to marry in the Territory of Guam."

The Department of Public Health and Social Services should treat "all same gender marriage applicants with dignity and equality under the Constitution," the attorney general said.

Leo Casil, the acting director of Guam's Department of Public Health and Social Services, said in an interview with The Associated Press on Friday that Territorial Registrar Carolyn Garrido, who issues marriage licenses and is named in the couple's lawsuit, "knows when and when not to issue."

He added that Garrido, who has been at the office for about 20 years, took out the local statute and showed the couple the law prior to denying their application for a marriage license.

50th Anniversary Celebration



Mr. and Mrs. Kuehn

Mr. and Mrs. Jerome and Donna Kuehn of Yankton, SD, will celebrate their 50th

In a radio interview Thursday with Newstalk K57 in Guam, Barrett-Anderson said that she cannot represent Calvo in the case because her position on the matter is completely different than his, though she said she respects his right to express his position.

"I'm not upset with Governor Calvo's position. I saw him struggle when we spoke. I saw him struggle as a governor, as a lawmaker and as a man," Barrett-Anderson said. "These are not easy issues."

wedding anniversary on April 23, 2015.

Jerome Kuehn and Donna Kruse were married on April 23, 1965.

The family includes daughter Melissa Stratman and husband Cotey and one granddaughter Camarie.

The family of the couple is requesting a card shower in their honor. Please send greetings to: 300 Riverside Dr., Yankton, SD 57078

Love your family,
Corey, Melissa & Camarie